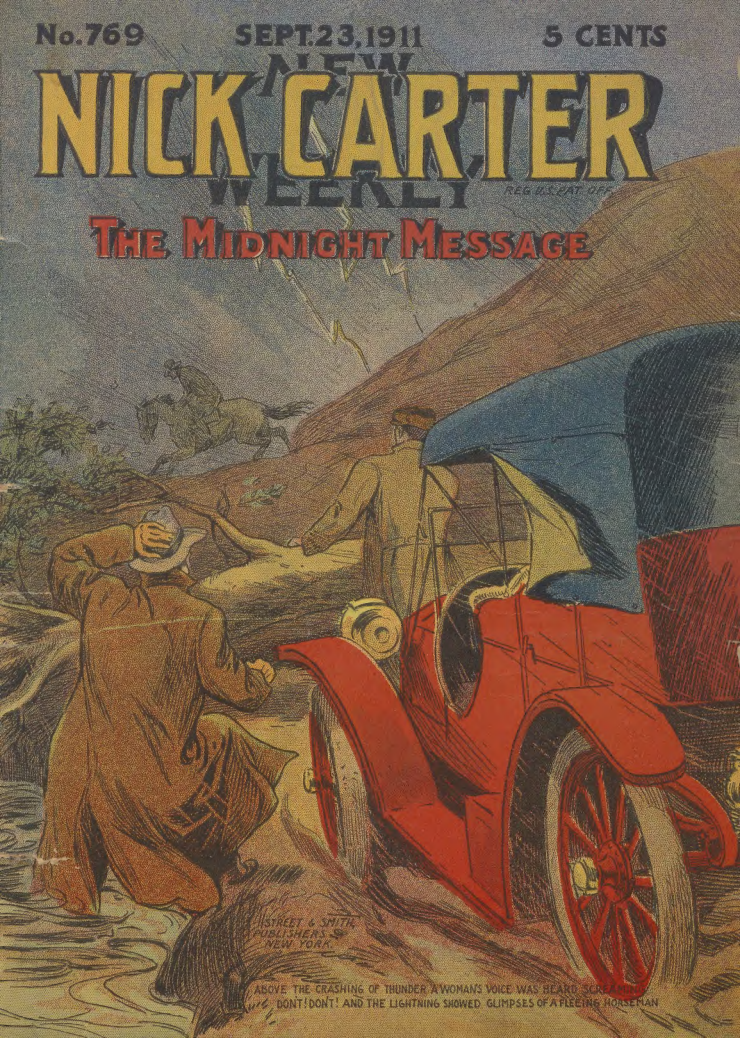
No. 769 SEPT. 23, 1911 5 CENTS

# NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

## THE MIDNIGHT MESSAGE


STREET & SMITH
PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK.
ABOVE THE CRASHING OF THUNDER A WOMAN'S VOICE WAS HEARD SCREAMING
DON'T! DON'T! AND THE LIGHTNING SHOWED GLIMPSES OF A FLEEING HORSEMAN

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

*Issued Weekly. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by* STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*
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No. 769. NEW YORK, September 23, 1911. Price Five Cents.

# The Midnight Message;

OR,

## NICK CARTER AND THE MOUNTAIN MYSTERY.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

### CHAPTER I.

AN INTERRUPTED TELEPHONE CALL.

Two incidents, which took place simultaneously, happened at midnight—that night of the great storm which no person who experienced it has forgotten.

One of these incidents happened to Nick Carter in his own sleeping room, in his own house in Madison Avenue, New York City; the other one happened to Patrick Garvan, his second assistant, known familiarly as Patsy, who was many miles away from his chief at the moment.

One was a message over the telephone—a strange and mysterious message, as will be demonstrated as we proceed; the other was—it would be impossible to give an idea of it, in one sentence or one paragraph, so it will relate it as it occurred, when we get to it.

But first the telephonic message must receive our attention.

Nick Carter had remained indoors that night. He had been particularly glad to be able to do so on account of the terrific storm that was raging outside—a storm which the newspapers of the ensuing day told him had extended, with almost unprecedented severity, all along the Atlantic coast, and far into the interior of the country.

The force of the wind amounted to a hurricane. It brought with it a rainstorm that can better be imagined than described, not so much because of the volume of water that fell, as on account of its penetrating qualities, for the force of the gale drove the water into every crevice it could find.

The detective had passed the first part of the evening in going over some papers in his filing room, and in some general work about his desk, in his study; the latter part of it he had occupied by reading—which was ever his favorite pastime when he could indulge in it.

At a quarter to twelve he extinguished the light and got into bed, and if he had expressed aloud the thought that was in his mind at that moment, it would have been:

"Patsy will have the experience of his life to-night,

if he is out in this storm. I hope that he and Danny have had sense enough to put up somewhere, and keep out of it."

He was just falling asleep when two sounds, coming simultaneously, roused him.

One was the chiming of his repeater, which was always suspended from a hook close to the head of his bed when he occupied it. The watch was ticking off in its musical rhythm the midnight hour. The other sound was the tinkling of his telephone bell.

The word "tinkling" is used advisedly, for that is all it did do—tinkle.

Ordinarily it would have rung out sharply enough, but on that occasion it only tinkled, as if it sought to rouse him and call him to it, but had not the strength to do so. The sound that it made was, of course, louder than the chimes of the watch, and yet had it not been for the comparison, it would barely have been considered so.

Wonderingly, the detective raised himself on his elbow and reached out for the instrument which stood upon a taboret at his bedside.

He put the receiver to his ear, and had enunciated the first syllable of the usual exclamation of such occasions, when he was arrested in the utterance by a voice on the wire.

"Oh, please—please—please! I want Mr. Carter at once!" it said; and it was the voice of a woman—a richly musical voice, even though there was a pleading, despairing note in it that told of some great excitement.

"This is Mr. Carter at the phone," the detective broke in, sharply and clearly. He was obliged to interrupt in order to say that much, for it appeared that the woman's voice would have continued on in the same strain in which it began.

"Oh! Thank Heaven! Come to me, Mr. Carter! Save me if you can. I am in the gravest danger that could imperil a young woman. Oh, sir, James Bemis was not——"

Silence followed—utter silence save for the roaring of the storm outside the windows of Nick Carter's room.

The voice on the wire suddenly had been stilled. Why had the speaker broken off so abruptly? If there had been a blow dealt her while she was at the transmitter at the other end of the wire, some indication of it would have reached the listening ear of the detective; or if she had been seized and pulled violently away from the instrument, some sound of the act must have reached him.

Not a sound came to him, however.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" he called, again and again.

There was no answer.

He hung up the receiver, waited a moment, and took it down again.

Central did not respond.

He worked the receiver hook up and down several times, but there was no answering click; and he realized that his own telephone was temporarily out of commission.

Three direct wires entered Nick Carter's house from the exchange—which was unusual, but which had been very serviceable to him on more than one occasion. They were the one in his sleeping room—this one over which he had received the call; the one in the room of Joseph, the butler, near the end of the hall on the main floor; and a third one, which was located in the room of Chick Carter, the famous detective's principal assistant.

The detective, pajama-clad as he was, hurried into Chick's room and grasped the receiver there; but, as before, no reply came from the exchange, nor was there an answering click to the movement of the hook.

"This wire is out of commission, too," Nick said to Chick, who had roused from sleep upon his chief's entrance to the room, and was sitting upright in the bed. "My private wire, also, is gone. I'll try the main wire, downstairs."

He hurried from Chick's room to the parlor floor of the house and to the last of the three telephones.

The result was precisely the same there as at the other two. The wire was not working.

"What is it, sir?" asked Joseph, who also had awakened.

"Nothing, Joseph. Go to sleep again," the detective replied. "The storm has destroyed our connections, that is all. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Joseph relapsed into sleep, for Joseph, the faithful, was one of those rare individuals who can sleep at any moment, and wake, and sleep again, without disturbance to the calm routine of his mind.

Nick Carter hastened to his own room again, snapped on the lights, and began a hurried selection of clothing appropriate for such a night as that one was. Chick, who had been waiting at the top of the stairs, followed him into the room, also pajama-clad.

"What's up, Nick?" he asked.

"I don't know," was the reply, while Nick continued his dressing.

"Where are you going?"

"To the telephone exchange."

"Can't I go for you? It's an awful night, old chap."

"You can go with me, if you are anxious to try the effect of this 'awful night,' as you call it, Chick. Thank you all the same."

"Do you want me to go with you?"

"If you like. I won't insist upon it."

Chick returned to the door and paused there.

"What is it all about?" he asked.

"A queer message came to me over the wire—or tried to come to me," the detective replied. "Wait a moment—unless you are going out with me. If you are, hurry along and get into your clothes. We can talk about this afterward."

Chick needed no further urging. He hurried from that room to his own, and was back again in a surprisingly short time considering what he had accomplished.

Nick, when his first assistant left him, paused long enough in his act of dressing to seize upon a pencil and a pad of paper on the table, and to write down, literally, all that the strangely interrupted message had contained.

When Chick returned, prepared to go out upon the streets, Nick pointed to the pad upon which he had been writing, and said:

"I have written down exactly what was said to me. Read it."

Chick took up the pad and read aloud:

"'Oh, please—please—please! I want Mr. Carter at once!' (I told her I was Mr. Carter.) 'Oh, Thank Heaven! Come to me, Mr. Carter. Save me if you can. I am in the gravest danger that could imperil a young woman. Oh, sir, James Bemis* was not——' "

Nick reached out his hand for the pad of paper, tore off the top sheet, folded it and put it into one of his pockets. Then the two left the house together, and breasted the storm.

If it had occurred to either of them to discuss the matter while on their way to the telephone exchange, it was speedily found to be an impossible feat.

They had all that they could do to make their way against the violence of the wind and rain, and the latter, driven with the terrific force of the gale, was like so many birdshot against the skin.

The manager at the exchange was all graciousness, and, in response to Nick Carter's request, he used every effort in his power to discover the source of the interrupted message, but it appeared that the operator at the board which had communicated the call to the detective could tell nothing about it at all. All that the manager could say in reply to the detective's inquiries was this:

"I am very sorry, Mr. Carter, but I cannot give you the slightest information about the matter, and there is no way of finding it out that I can see. You say that your repeater was chiming midnight when the call came to you?"

"Yes," replied the detective. "And my watch agrees perfectly with your time here."

"Well, sir, it was exactly midnight when some violent electrical disturbance threw every plug in this room out of its socket, badly shocked some of the young women—the one who was at that board in particular—and temporarily threw everybody here into a panic. Miss Seaman, who was at that board and who was severely shocked, as I have said, thinks—*thinks*, mind you—that the call came from out of town; but she is not sure. She was very badly rattled. There were many plugs in use in the board at the time, a score or more, probably, and she cannot say positively. I am very sorry."

"Can I talk with Miss Seaman for a moment?" the detective asked.

"Certainly. Come with me, please."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE EFFECTS OF AN ELECTRIC STORM.

The detective found that the manager of the exchange had not exceeded the truth when he described Miss Seaman as being considerably "rattled" by the shock she had sustained while at work at her board. He questioned her; but he did it so quietly, and sympathized with her condition so dexterously, that he soothed, rather than invited, the threatened hysteria.

Her eyes were red with weeping; she trembled, and her fingers jerked nervously, but she replied to his questions with as much calmness as she could.

"Miss Seaman," he said, "it is a very rare occurrence for me to get a call over that wire at all. You know that, don't you?"

"Why, no," she replied. "I always send them in over that wire, don't I?"

"My private wire? The one we call the X-Y-Z?"

"But there was no call over that wire, Mr. Carter," she replied.

"I received it over that wire."

*See preceding issue NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Lost Clew," for general information about James Bemis.

"But how could that be so? The call—I remember it perfectly—was for your regular number. There are three calls in your house. I know them all."

"Yes."

"One is a plain number; the other two are lettered with their numbers."

"Precisely."

"I remember, Mr. Carter, that the call I received for you was the number. If I gave the X-Y-Z call, it must have been that in my nervous condition—I was terribly frightened at the storm—I put the plug in the wrong socket. That is the only way in which I can account for it, sir."

"Well, at least I get some satisfaction out of that. Very few persons have the X-Y-Z call at my house, and even those who have it are permitted to use it only in cases of great emergency, or by special appointment."

"I know that, sir."

"You are sure, then, that the call was for the regular number?"

"Yes, sir. I am positive of that."

"And you attribute the X-Y-Z call to your own error, made through nervousness?"

"It is the only explanation, Mr. Carter. I am very sorry."

"Don't misunderstand me, Miss Seaman. I am not finding fault, or criticizing. I only wish with all my heart that we could determine where the call came from."

She shook her head.

"I haven't the least idea," she said, "and it would be utterly impossible to find it out now."

"The manager tells me that you think it was an out-of-town call, however."

"Yes. I am quite sure that it was what we call a 'trunk line.'"

"Could you give me any idea as to what trunk line?"

"I would be guessing at it, sir."

"Very well, guess."

"I am under the impression that it was Jersey; but it amounts to no more than an impression."

"Do you remember anything about the call itself? Was it a woman's voice that requested the number?"

"Oh, that was done by the operator at another exchange, of course."

"Well, it tells us that the call did not come from any subscriber on this exchange."

"Yes, sir."

"Is that positively all that you can tell me?"

"Yes, sir. I was very busy at the time, which is unusual when such a storm is raging. As a usual thing people keep off the wire at such a time, but they seemed all to bunch themselves on my board just then. And I was afraid. I remember that it was only a moment after the call came in for your number that there was a crash as if the building had been torn down, and every plug in the board flew out of it."

The detective turned to the manager, and they walked away together.

"To-morrow," said Nick, "as soon as everything is working smoothly——"

"It will be late to-morrow before that is accomplished," the manager interrupted. "We have more 'trouble' on our hands just now, in this exchange, than I remember since I have been in this business. All three of your own connections are out of order, and the——"

"Yes. I know that others are also out of commission."

"Things won't be going smoothly before to-morrow afternoon, Mr. Carter."

"Well, as soon as they are running smoothly I want you, personally, to do something for me, if you will."

"Certainly."

"I want you to have your operators make inquiries over every trunk line out of this exchange."

"Oh, yes. You want that call traced."

"I do."

"It shall be done—only I cannot promise with what success."

"Of course not. But it is likely, if you use every wire you have, and follow each one up to the limit, that you can discover where that call came from, isn't it?"

"It is positive—unless the same thing happened elsewhere."

"That is not likely—that is, it isn't likely that such a thing happened at the same moment when it happened here."

"No. Still——"

"Well?"

"Operators were pretty generally rattled all through this section of the country, Mr. Carter. I presume, however, that the call you are inquiring about was recorded somewhere, by some operator; and if it was recorded, it will be found. The only trouble is that, as in the case of many calls here, it might not have been recorded."

"That is a possibility, of course."

"A whole lot can happen inside a telephone exchange in sixty seconds, Mr. Carter."

"I know."

"And a whole lot goes through this one every sixty seconds in the twenty-four hours of a day."

"Without doubt."

"But I will do the best I can for you."

"That is all I ask," said Nick.

Again with Chick beside him, the detective braved the storm and returned to his own home. They found on their arrival that they had been absent just fifty minutes; also, that they were wet to the skin, notwithstanding their supposed waterproof garments. Truly that was a terrible storm.

Nick removed his soaked clothing, donned his pajamas again, and went to the study. After a few moments Chick, similarly arrayed, joined him there.

"I wanted to ask you about that call," Chick said, as he entered, helping himself to a cigar from the box, and half reclining upon the leather-covered couch. "Do you realize that you haven't said a single word to me about the circumstance?"

"I do. There hasn't been an opportunity."

"All that I know about it is what you wrote on that sheet of paper, before we went out."

Nick nodded.

"And the use of the pronoun inside the parenthesis of what you wrote tells me that the person who called was a woman?"

"Yes. It was the voice of a woman."

"One that you recognized?"

"No. I doubt if I had ever heard the voice before then; I doubt still more that I would have recognized it, even if it had been a familiar one. It was very faint and far away, although sufficiently clear as to enunciation. Even the telephone bell, when it rang, only tinkled, as if it was tired out. That about expresses the idea."

"But who would call you up in that manner, and make use of the name of the dead Jimmy Bemis?" Chick asked.

Nick Carter wrinkled his brows, a thing which he rarely did unless he was strangely perplexed.

"James Bemis is not a common name, to be sure," he said. "Still, it is within possibility that there might have been two men who called themselves James Bemis. Besides, James Bemis was not the right name of the man who bore it. His real name was probably Bixby."

"And he is dead," said Chick.

The famous detective nodded.

"So far as you know——" Chick began.

"Now, just hold your horses for a minute, Chick," Nick interrupted, smiling. "You are going too fast for me. As the case stands, it's like this, as I see it."

"That is what I was trying to get at; how do you see it?"

"To be entirely truthful, Chick, I don't see it at all. Jimmy Bemis was a man who lived in the town of Barrington, New Jersey, under that name, which we know was not his rightful one."

"Yes."

"He amused himself by robbing houses in the different towns of the country where he lived temporarily, and he had as many names as he did places of reference. He had pursued that course for several years, leaving no trail behind him, until he struck Barrington —where the residents finally sent for me after he had robbed them of several hundred thousand dollars' worth of property.

"But, Jimmy Bemis is dead. It has not occurred to me that there can be any doubt of that. I was fortunate enough to get on his track that night he ran away from Barrington, and, as you know, his automobile was wrecked, and his dead body was found with the wreck —together with the loot he was taking from Barrington that night."

"Didn't you tell me that there was a woman mixed up in that attempted escape of his, somehow?"

"Why, yes, only she had nothing directly to do with the case."

"I have always wanted to ask you more about it, Nick. You told me only a little, you know. You were more interested in the cipher that Bemis used than in the woman who was connected with the affair, and in——"

"There wasn't any woman connected with the affair, Chick. I have told you that she had nothing to do with it."

"Well, all the same, tell me about it while we smoke, won't you? I have wanted to ask you, and now this telephone business has brought it to mind."

"Oh, well, if you want to hear about it?"

"I do."

"The town of Barrington had suffered from a mysterious burglar. The citizens organized a committee and sent for me. I nosed around there for a time, and finally came to the conclusion that a man known as James Bemis, who had gone there to live only a year before that time, might be the burglar. I got that notion—well, never mind that; it doesn't matter now."

"No."

"One night, when Bemis was supposed to be absent, I went to his house—entered it like a burglar myself, you know, and so got onto his trail."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE TELEPHONE MYSTERY.

"That is the part of it that I want to hear about," said Chick. "That is the part where the woman comes into it."

"Well, I went to his house, which was owned by a man named Simeon Spaulding and leased to Bemis—and broke into it, to search it. You see I had only suspicion against Bemis at the time."

"Yes."

"He was supposed to have gone to Philadelphia. I had about completed my search when, happening to look out of a window, I saw a man crossing the yard toward the garage. He was carrying a filled sack."

"Bemis, of course?"

"I supposed so, although I could not be sure of that, as I had never seen Bemis in my life. But he was going toward the garage where Bemis kept his car, and the presumption, in connection with my suspicions, was that it was Bemis."

"Naturally."

"He was close to the garage when I discovered him, so that by the time I was out of the house and after him, he had entered the garage, and jumped into the car after cranking it. He shot out of the place and came near to running me down, before I could get to him."

"But the fact that he ran away satisfied you that it was Bemis, didn't it?"

"Of course. My own car wasn't very far away, but it took me several minutes to get it, all the same. Then I took after him."

"But he had got a good start, eh?"

"Yes. I lost a little more time in finding out which road he had taken away from Barrington. He had a good twenty minutes start of me when the chase really began. I knew that he had a good car."

"Well?"

"I had gone ten or twelve miles, perhaps more, when I came upon the wrecks of two automobiles beside the road. They had met head-on, and were smashed to scrap iron. When I first saw the wrecks I hoped that one of them was the car I was after; but I speedily found that there was no such luck."

"Two other cars, eh?"

"Yes. Both of them belonged to a man named Roger Graham—a millionaire of whom you have heard. He is a cousin to that other Graham who once was our minister to Austria. He has another cousin who is prominent in politics now."

"Oh, yes, I know."

"He had been driving one of the wrecked cars, and had a young woman with him. Her name was Phyllis Baxter. Her father is Francis Baxter, a leather dealer, down in the swamp. He is also a millionaire."

"I have heard of him, too."

"The other wrecked car had been driven by a chauffeur whom Graham had hired without having seen the man at all. His name was Paul Hadley. He was taking the car to Graham. It was a new car, and Hadley also was on his way to report to Graham for his new duties, when the two came together, head-on, in the middle of the road."

"I see."

"All this I found out afterward. When I came upon the scene, Graham was there alone. He had a sprained wrist, and was pretty generally shaken up, although he stood it well. The two others—Miss Baxter and Hadley—had been picked up by a doctor who had passed, on his way to answer to a hurry call. The doctor had agreed to take them to Logan's Corners, three miles away, where Miss Baxter was to wait at the hotel while Hadley found a conveyance and returned to the scene of the wreck, after his employer. The doctor could not, or would not, take them all, and Graham's sprained wrist let him out of running a car."

"I see. And the 'doctor' was the man you were after, eh?"

"Precisely—Bemis. He had a roadster, with a rumble seat behind."

"Yes."

"He took the young woman in beside him, and Hadley got into the rumble. At the village he stopped in front of the hotel, and while Hadley was trying to rouse the proprietor—it was midnight, or near that—Bemis started his car ahead, and ran away with the young woman."

"Why did he do that, Nick?"

"It hasn't appeared. I really don't suppose there was any reason other than a sudden whim."

"But he did run away with her, eh?"

"Yes; there is nothing to show that she ever had seen the man before, and probably she had not. When I found out what had happened, I started on, after telling Graham to jump out, for I had taken him with me as far as the hotel, and I managed to follow on the trail, as far as a very bad piece of road that dips down a steep hill to the canal road.

"That bit of road is called the Dublin road. It begins at a ledge, or near one, at the top of the hill. The road looked bad to me, but I couldn't see that Bemis

had gone on, along the ledge. If he hadn't done that, he had to go down that hill. Where he could go, I figured, that I could follow, so I went down."

"Bad place, was it?"

"I won't attempt to describe it. It is too awful for words. How I got down through it without an accident, I don't know. At the bottom of it I turned south, believing that to be the direction that Bemis would naturally take.

"Now, from the hotel at Logan's Corners, Graham and Hadley had followed in a hired car. They did not go as far as the Dublin road——"

"How could they follow your trail?"

"Oh; I had a coat pocket filled with rice. Some of the rice that we used for you to follow me in the Covington case, a few days before that. I called out to them, when I left them at the hotel, that I would throw out the rice."

"Then why didn't they go all the way to the hill that you call the Dublin road?"

"Their driver knew the place and wouldn't go there—then. He took them across lots, or something of the sort, and finally brought them around to it by another route. When they got there, they decided that Bemis' car, and mine, too, had gone down the hill to the canal road. But the countryman wouldn't follow. He balked. The result of it was that Hadley was left there, to follow on foot down the hill in that manner, while Graham and his driver went around by another way. They were to meet at the bottom of the hill; or, if not, Hadley was to leave a note there, pinned to a tree, or the fence."

"I see."

"Well, ultimately, I met Graham and his driver in the hired car. We then went together, to the foot of the Dublin road. There wasn't any note there, so I went up the hill on foot. At the top of it I found a note fastened to a tree. The note said that Miss Baxter had been found and rescued, and that there was the wreck of a car, and a dead man, over the top of the ledge, in the gully. The note was signed by Hadley.

"I searched under the ledge, and found the wreck of the car, the dead man, and the sack I had seen the man carrying across the yard in Barrington. The other two wrecks had caught fire, and burned, but that one had not, and I had no difficulty in recognizing the car that Bemis had been driving.

"I returned to the foot of the hill and told the others what I had found, and that Hadley probably had taken Miss Baxter back along the road by which they had come. Graham and his driver started in search of them, and I made tracks for the county seat to report the whole affair to the proper authorities.

"Spaulding and another man of the committee came over from Barrington and identified Bemis and the loot. Graham wired me, during the day that followed, that he had heard from Hadley and Miss Baxter, and that they were all right. Later I talked with him over the telephone and clinched that part of it; then I went back to Barrington, and Spaulding helped me to search the house which Bemis had occupied.

"You know about the cipher that we found there. This told us how to find the stolen property, and all that?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's all."

"So far as you know, then, Miss Baxter is the only woman who has had anything to do with Bemis, and, therefore, is the only one who would have reason to suppose that you would locate the name of Bemis when you heard it over the telephone?"

"Yes."

"Well, doesn't that suggest to you that it was Miss Baxter who made use of that telephone to-night?"

"Of course it does. But, why should even she use it? Why should she telephone to me about him? I never saw the girl in my life."

"Nor did you see Bemis, till after he was dead, did you?"

"No—only when I saw him passing through the yard in the dark."

"Nor Hadley, either?"

"I had only a glimpse of Hadley—in front of the hotel, at Logan's Corners. I could not have told if he was black, or white."

"Well, somebody telephoned to you to-night to say that 'Bemis was not'—what?"

"Search me, Chick. I give it up."

"Was not killed, perhaps?"

"Humph! He was identified by nearly the entire town of Barrington. He had been known in that place, socially, for a year."

"There is something about this case that interests me, Nick," said Chick.

"There is a whole lot about it that interests me, too," was the reply.

"Will you do anything more about that telephone business?"

"No more than I have already done. If no record of the call can be found anywhere by the telephone exchange, we will have to pass it up."

"What about communicating with Miss Baxter?"

"I have thought of that; but what's the use? If she telephoned to me to-night, she will do it again."

"Unless she was murdered to-night, or some other equally dreadful thing has happened to her."

"In either case we will hear something about it, won't we? The newspapers will have it, or if she should be simply missing—well, we would hear about that, too, in the course of events; eh?"

"Probably. All the same——"

"Well?"

"It won't do any harm, will it, to call her up to-morrow, and find out if she asked for you over the phone to-night?"

"No. You can do it for me."

"Suppose she isn't at home?"

"Then call up Graham, and ask him where she is. He probably will know. I got the idea, in some way, that they are engaged to be married. It may or may not be so, but he will know about her."

"Very well. I will do that."

"You'll have to wait till the wires are working."

"I know. Well, I'm going to bed. Good night."

## CHAPTER IV.

### AT MIDNIGHT ON THE MOUNTAIN.

The other incident referred to in the opening paragraph of this story happened also at midnight—that night of the great storm—that night in the month of November, so near the end of it that it took place after Thanksgiving Day.

The other incident concerned Patsy. Nick Carter, about to retire, had reflected:

"Patsy will have the experience of his life to-night if he is out in this storm. I hope that he and Danny will have sense enough to put up somewhere and keep out of it."

For the benefit of those persons whose knowledge of New Jersey is confined to the flats which the railroads cross in passing to and from New York, it may be said that there are mountains in that State. They might not be dignified by that name elsewhere in the world, but they are sufficiently rugged and wild to be classed as such, and the mountainous district which Patsy and Danny traversed that wild night might well have been the Rockies, for all that could be seen of them through the blur of the storm.

Patsy might as well have been in bed at the hotel where he and Danny took supper as where he was, traversing a mountain road which the falling torrents of water were rapidly rendering impassable; where the ditches on either side of it had become rivers which sometimes tore through the road itself; where the violence of the gale had torn trees from their roots and sent them sprawling down across the turnpiked thoroughfare; where, but for the almost incessant flashing of the lightning, and the searchlight at the front of the car, the darkness which an Irishman once said was "like his hat—it might be felt."

But Patsy's eagerness to be up and doing had taken him out that night when he might better have remained at the hotel at Logan's Corners, twenty miles behind him. He was after nothing of more importance than an affidavit which Nick wanted, and which could have been obtained a week hence.

There had been some thought of remaining at the hotel, too, for, after the supper, while Patsy was smoking his cigar, Danny, Nick's chauffeur, who went out to look after the car, returned to say that the storm which had commenced shortly before they stopped there for the meal, had increased in violence, and promised to be a bad one.

"I'm thinking that maybe we'd better be staying here for the night, sir," he said.

"What! Because there's a little rain falling, and a light wind blowing?" replied Patsy.

"It's a good deal of rain, sir, and a heap of wind, too," was the reply. "The landlord said we'd have to cross the mountain, and there's likely to be washouts."

"Danny, I'm amazed at you," said Patsy. "Is the car ready?"

"It is, sir."

"Plenty of gasoline and light?"

"Sure—only we'll not be wanting much light of our own. The heavens will supply that, I'm thinking. The second flash comes before the first one is over, and the third catches the tail of the first one, too."

"Well, you may stay here and go to bed, if you want to. I'm going on."

There was no reply that was quite adequate to express Danny's contempt for such a remark as that one, so Danny went out and brought the car around to the front of the hotel without saying another word.

It was half past seven o'clock. At half past eleven, when their searchlight glared upon the huge head of an Indian that some enterprising advertising man had painted against the flat surface of a monster bowlder which marked a sharp turn in the road, Danny brought

the car to a stop for perhaps the hundredth time since the start.

"What's the matter now?" Patsy asked him.

"Don't you see that Indian's head, on the rock ahead of us?" asked Danny.

"Sure I do. What of it?"

"Do you know what time it is?"

"I'll look. It's half past eleven."

"Do you remember what the landlord at the hotel said about that painted head of an Indian?"

"Yes. He said that the road made a sharp turn to the right, ascended one more steep hill and then down again."

"That's what he said. He also said that it was twenty miles to the top of the mountain. We've been four hours making less than twenty miles, sir."

"Well, what of it? We've had to move three trees from across the road, and pick our way through half a dozen torrents of water in that time. I think we are making very good time, under the circumstances. I'm glad we haven't got to move that rock out of the way. Go on, Danny."

"Don't you wish we had stayed at the hotel?" Danny asked, as they drove past the rock and made the turn preparatory to ascending the hill.

"Frankly, I do. But we didn't, so what's the use talking about it. Hello! What's that?"

He might well have asked the question, although, in reality, there was no need to ask it, for the most inexperienced ear would have recognized the sounds that they heard above the rolling thunder and the rush of the storm.

The scream of a woman in mortal terror cannot well be mistaken; nor can the sudden, sharp, and barking discharge of a heavy-calibered pistol; and those were the sounds they heard and recognized above the storm.

A wild scream was quickly followed by two shrilly uttered words, and then the shot.

"Don't! Don't!" the woman's voice cried out immediately after the scream, and instantly before the pistol shot.

They were quite near to the top of the hill when these sounds were borne to them on the wings of the wind. Then a lurid, double flash of forked lightning shot down from the heavens almost upon them, seeming to strike something just beyond the crest of the hill a few rods ahead of them.

The lightning was followed instantly by a crash of thunder which almost deafened them. Danny uttered a cry of alarm, shut off his power, and applied the brakes, bringing the car to a sudden stop.

A large tree beside the road, and just at the crest of the rise, struck by one of the electric bolts, was crashing into the roadway, and if Danny had not brought the car to a stop the tree would have fallen directly upon them.

He did not hear Patsy's exclamation and question. It is doubtful if Patsy realized that he had spoken.

The falling tree was not all that the lurid lightning revealed to them, for it showed a man on horseback, in the act of turning into the road at a point just beyond the crest of the hill.

The crashing thunder drowned the sound of hoof-beats.

The instant the car stopped, Patsy leaped from it to the ground to escape, if possible, the wide-spreading branches of the falling tree. Danny followed him. Both expected that the car in which they had been seated would be wrecked.

But it was not.

The wind, fiercer then than it had been before in all that night, pushed the falling monster in another direction, and only the ends of a few of the longest branches touched the car at all.

A woman's scream had been heard, then the piteous pleading of the two words of terror. These had been followed by the pistol shot, after which the man had been seen riding away on horseback, bending low over the pommel of his saddle.

The man had gone down the hill away from them, in the direction they had been traveling, but the huge tree, smitten by the thunderbolt, was lying across the road in front of them, rendering immediate pursuit impossible.

The size of the tree that had fallen effectually barred the further progress of the car.

It is not exaggeration to say that all these thoughts flashed through the mind of Patsy even as he sprang from the car to safety, in the belief that the monster of the forest would crush it to pieces.

When he jumped, he alighted in the ditch beside the road, up to his thighs in water, but he scrambled out of it the instant he knew that the falling giant was not to touch them, and he ran forward in the direction whence the sound of the shot had come.

And the flashing of the lightning revealed him to Danny who, having jumped out at the opposite side of the car, now followed him.

Just over the crest of the hill a gateway, from which the bars had been removed, yawned at the right-hand side of the road, and it was from that direction that the sound had come.

The flashing of the lightning was so incessant that Patsy was enabled to see plainly what was before him, and he ran through the open gateway along a weed-grown roadway that led toward the depths of the wood.

Within a few rods of the entrance to that strange place the wood road made a sharp turn toward the left to avoid an abrupt ledge that was directly ahead, and over which there was a sheer fall of twenty feet or more, and Patsy came very near to dashing directly over it.

But another brilliant flash of the lightning showed him the danger just in time; and it revealed other things as well. It is amazing how much a person may see and comprehend in just one such flash.

At the very edge of the ledge of rocks above the lower-lying ground was the drenched figure of a woman lying prone upon the smooth rock, so close to the edge of it that it was not conceivable how she had escaped falling over the edge into the abyss below; and, even as Patsy discovered her, he saw, beyond her, upon the level stretch of cleared ground that was twenty or thirty feet lower than where he stood, a low, square building, so old that it was moss-grown. Here he saw an open door facing him; and then, for a period that was longer than any that had yet occurred, the lightning ceased to flash, and black darkness enveloped the entire scene.

But Patsy's electric torch was in one of his pockets. He reached for it, and, with two more leaps, he reached the body of the woman and bent over it.

Then, while he adjusted the spring of his electric torch so that it would shed a steady light, he called aloud to Danny.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE HOUSE ON THE MOUNTAIN.

The instant that Patsy touched the woman he knew that she was not dead. Her heart was beating, and she was still breathing, but both of these evidences of life were only barely perceptible.

As Danny came up in obedience to the call, another prolonged flash of the lightning revealed the house again, and Patsy called out to him:

"Here, Danny. Take my light and find a road, or a path that will take us to that old house down there. Lead the way for me, so that I can follow."

"What have you got there?" Danny asked, as he reached for the light.

He had not seen the woman on the ground, but, even as he asked the question, another flash revealed the woman to him.

"It's a woman," Patsy replied, lifting her in his arms as he spoke. "She is wounded. She was wounded by that shot we heard. The revolver was fired by that man we saw escaping. Quick, Danny—find the road, for there must be one."

With Danny leading the way, Patsy struggled down the road with his burden, stumbling over the rocks in the path, and many times narrowly escaping a fall.

Half a dozen rods farther along they found a path which led them directly into the level valley below, and to the open door of the old building.

The open door happened to be at the lee side of the house, and not much of the storm had beaten into it. While Danny lighted the way for him, Patsy carried his burden inside.

To his utter amazement, he saw that the one room that the building contained was comfortably and very completely furnished, and he carried the woman to a cot bed which the electric torch revealed to him.

Danny closed the door.

Patsy took the light from him and began a hasty survey of the room, speedily discovering a large lamp on the table which the wind had blown out. The lamp was still warm, too, showing that only a short time had passed since it was extinguished.

A fire, nearly burned out, glowed on a hearth in the chimney. In a few moments Patsy had relighted the lamp.

But neither of the men gave much thought to the place just then. They gave all their attention to the unconscious woman.

A well-stocked cupboard in the room provided them with ammonia and camphor and a flask of brandy. Patsy already had discovered that the wound the woman had received might not prove to be a serious one.

The bullet, probably aimed at her brain, had glanced along the right side of her head, above and behind the ear, and Patsy thought that unless the impact of it had fractured the skull in passing, it was not necessarily a dangerous wound.

Patsy deftly cut away the luxuriant growth of brown hair from the wound, dressed it with all the skill of a practiced surgeon, and bound it with bandages which he tore from a sheet that a second cupboard provided.

But every effort they made to revive her was vain.

Two or three times, while they worked over her, she opened her eyes and stared up at them, shuddering as

she did so; then she closed her eyes again and relapsed into coma.

But Patsy did succeed in getting some of the brandy down her throat. This stimulated the action of her heart, and after a while she seemed to be sleeping.

The young woman was drenched to the skin, of course. There was a supply of wood beside the fireplace. This Danny heaped upon the coals, soon producing a roaring fire. Patsy wrapped his patient in blankets, and drew the cot upon which he had laid her close to the blaze. Outside, the storm was still howling; the lightning was flashing, and the thunder crashed and rolled, while the rain continued to descend in sheets.

"Well, Danny, we have done everything that we can do, now," Patsy said, at last. "If my wife were here she would probably insist upon getting the patient into dry clothing; but I honestly think she is better off as she is."

Danny nodded in the affirmative. He had no opinion on the subject and, therefore, adopted Patsy's. Now that they both regarded the woman as practically out of danger, they gave their attention to other things.

The interior of the building itself was the first thing to engage their attention. That it was the abode of a person of refinement, and that person a woman, was to be seen at a glance; nor was Patsy long in determining that the woman who had lived there was an artist of no mean ability.

The walls were covered with sketches, drawings, paintings in oils, water colors, pastels. The brackets, shelves, and the old-fashioned what-not in a corner of the room contained many models in clay.

An easel near one of the four windows, all of which had been closely shuttered against the storm, held an almost completed painting. A taboret beside the easel held palettes, brushes, and the general paraphernalia of an artist.

On another easel was a completed portrait of the woman on the cot, evidently done by herself, for Patsy had not the slightest doubt that she was the occupant of the cottage. The young woman was hatless and without a wrap of any sort. On her feet were the lightest kind of house slippers, such as dainty women wear.

There was a solitaire diamond ring on the third finger of her left hand, and behind it a plain gold ring. This latter Patsy had examined with some care while he was attending her, and he had discovered inside of it the engraved initials, "J. J. B. to E. T. C." It was undoubtedly a wedding ring, although it was without date.

In one corner of the room near the fireplace was a three-cornered closet which Patsy did not open until he began a general inspection of the premises. When, at last, he did open it, he exclaimed:

"Look here, Danny. What do you think of that?"

All that the closet contained was a wrecked telephone instrument, which had evidently been lately torn from its fastenings and smashed upon the floor.

"Who'd have thought to find a telephone in a place like this, Danny?" he asked again.

"It doesn't look to me as if we had found one," was Danny's reply. "It's the wreck of one, all right, though. And it wasn't wrecked by lightning, either."

"No. The hand of a man did that," said Patsy. "Probably it was the same hand that fired the bullet at the woman. Eh?"

"Looks like it," agreed Danny.

"What is that on the floor, over near the door?" Patsy asked, glancing about the room in search of other things. All the instincts of the detective were aroused in him then.

Danny picked up the indicated article and examined it.

"It's a leather loop off a riding crop," he announced.

Patsy nodded.

"It was brought here by the man," he said. He turned his eyes again toward the wreck of the telephone instrument. "Hello!" he said. "Look here." He bent over and lifted the small battery case from the floor. "There is a bullet hole through this," he added. "Now, I wonder if——"

He broke off in the middle of the sentence and went again to the cot where the victim of the pistol shot was lying.

"I thought so," he said, after a moment of examination. He pointed at what he had previously thought to be a scratch on the woman's left cheek, probably sustained in falling on the rocks where he had found her.

"What about it?" asked Danny.

"When I was dressing the real wound, I thought this one was a scratch," Patsy replied.

"Well, isn't it? It looks like one."

"No. It marks the passage of another bullet—the one that imbedded itself in the battery case of the telephone. That fiend must have shot twice at her—once, in this room, while she was at the telephone, or when she ran toward it to use it, perhaps, and again out there where we found her."

"He wasn't a very good shot, at that," said Danny. "What's puzzling me is how did she get way out there to be shot at?"

Patsy did not reply. He was thinking.

"I suppose she chased him out of the house," Danny continued, answering his own question.

"No," said Patsy. "That is not likely."

"Then how was it?"

"Why, answer the question for yourself, Danny. What would be her first impulse after that man entered this room, and threatened to kill her, and actually tried to do so, by shooting at her. She would run away from him, wouldn't she?"

"Sure."

"And, in the dark, she would select the road she knew best, which would be the path we followed in coming down here; and he would pursue her. That is how she happened to be out there on the ledge when he fired the shot that so nearly killed her."

Danny nodded comprehendingly.

"Maybe she was making for the horse, to get away on it, knowing that he would have come to her in that manner," he suggested.

"The very thing," agreed Patsy. "And that accounts for his mounting and riding away so quickly after the shot that we heard was fired."

"Right you are, Patsy. Are you sure that she's going to pull through?"

Patsy shook his head dubiously.

"I wish we could get her away from here, to a doctor. We could, if it were not for that fallen tree."

"Huh!" replied Danny. "There is always an ax around a place like this. I can find it, if there is one, and I can make a passage past that tree inside of half an hour."

"Good, Danny. Do so; and, while you are at it, I will make a thorough search of this place and of everything that is in it."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE WOMAN WHO LIVED ALONE.

Danny, having provided himself with a lantern which he discovered in the small closet where the telephone instrument had been so ruthlessly torn from the wall, passed from the room by a rear door, to find an ax and attack the tree. Patsy looked at his watch.

It was half past twelve—an hour since the headlight of the car had revealed to them the painted Indian head.

While Danny was engaged upon the task he had set for himself, Patsy drew a chair near to the cot on which the wounded woman was lying. He seated himself and lighted a cigar, in order, as he would have expressed it, "to think the better."

For the sake of connected thought he sought to put the occurrences and circumstances of the night consecutively, as they had happened, and as he had encountered them.

Here was a woman—evidently something of a hermit by choice—living alone in an old house at the top of the mountain. The house probably had been remodeled and repaired for her accommodation.

She was young, rather beautiful, an artist beyond question, a recluse by implication, a person of taste and refinement as everything about the place indicated; a wife, if the wedding ring was an indication of her condition; mayhap a widow, although there was nothing there to suggest that; at all events it was certain after the cursory examination that he had so far made that she had lived alone in the house.

The house itself, a very old but substantial one, was sound and dry even on that terrible night.

A comparatively new hardwood floor was covered with several expensive rugs, the mission furnishings were of the best quality, and the general contents of the place indicated that there had been no lack of money in the making of the young woman's arrangements.

The fact that she lived alone in the place might have been due to the accepted eccentricities of persons who followed her profession. Artists always claimed license for doing the unusual.

Patsy figured it out that a few minutes before midnight the man who had shot her had appeared suddenly in her doorway, out of the storm.

No doubt the door had been locked, but a summons at it on such a night would have called her to it at once, and doubtless would have induced her to open it without question, in the belief that some traveler in the storm was seeking assistance.

"Was the man who had appeared known to her, or was he a stranger?" Patsy asked himself.

The answer seemed obvious to Patsy.

Had he entered the place to rob it, or had he gone there merely to interview the woman who lived there?

There was not the slightest indication anywhere that the man had gone there to steal, because Patsy already had come upon many things of value, among them a sum of money in bills, and some jewelry that would have been well worth the taking.

It seemed, in Patsy's judgment, that the man had barely more than stepped into the one large room of

the house when he fired the first shot from his revolver, the bullet of which had scratched her cheek before it bored its way through the telephone instrument.

"Well, then," Patsy continued in thought, following the line he had adopted, "the man came here to kill. He selected this stormy night for his deed, knowing that there would be no possible danger of interruption, and that no report of a firearm could be heard to the road, above the din of the thunder.

"If, when she saw him, and recognized him, as she did without doubt, she ran at once to the telephone to call for assistance, or to tell who was there threatening her; it was not necessary for him to have shot her in order to prevent the act she attempted."

That one glimpse that Patsy had had of the man through the storm and in the flashing of the lightning had indicated that he was large and powerfully built. It would have been easy for him to have seized her and dragged her away from the instrument—unless he had gone to the house with the intention of killing her.

But why had he not shot her a second time, seeing that the first attempt was a failure?

It were easy to have done so, doubtless, while she was running across the room toward the door in order to escape, as had been suggested; and the man doubtless held in his hand either a revolver, or an automatic gun. It was not at all likely that the two shots accounted for were all that it contained.

"Did she fall, at the first shot, and did the man suppose that he had killed her, and so turn away, and give her an opportunity to leap to her feet and to dash out of the house, away from him?" Patsy asked himself,

He nodded his head, deciding that it had happened so, for, otherwise, the man would have delivered a second shot then and there; and there was no evidence that a second shot had been fired inside the house.

"Why did she run to the telephone?" was the next question on which the detective reflected.

Here also it seemed to him that the answer was obvious.

He must have been a man whom she had not at all expected to see, else she would not have opened the door to him. He must have been one whom she had occasion to fear, and whose presence there was, in itself, a threat; and he was likely one whom she feared would some time appear, and against whose coming she had arranged with the exchange with which her telephone communicated, to notify it so that assistance might be sent to her.

Patsy knew, from the road map he carried in his pocket, and which he had studied carefully before leaving the hotel where he had supped, that three miles down the mountain in the direction he had been traveling, there was a village, and he had no doubt that the telephone had its connection there.

"I'll find that out when I get there, and all that is known about her," he told himself.

His assumption that the woman had opened the door to admit the man was based upon the certainty that otherwise he could not have gained admittance to the house at all.

To do so would have required an ax or a crowbar, and considerable time and effort.

"I must assume that she was seated in that chair, near the table, and was reading the book that is open and turned face down within reach of her hand, if she was there," he muttered. "It is probable that she heard a summons at her door, and—as any woman would do under the circumstances—she went to it and asked who was there.

"The man outside, although known to her when she saw him, probably disguised his voice in replying, and made some plea which influenced her to open the door; and the only plea which would serve such a purpose, at such a time and hour, made to a lone woman unprotected, would be the claim that another woman was out there in the storm and claimed her assistance. It is probable, too, that the man outside was capable of imitating the voice of a woman in distress; in either case, and in the face of such a plea, she would have opened the door.

"I must assume that the instant she saw him she recognized him, and realized her peril—doubtless she knew, in that instant, that he had come here to kill her.

"Over there, in the drawer of her dressing table, is an automatic thirty-two revolver, ready for instant use, but to get to it from the door she would have had to pass around the table, and there was no time to do that, even if it occurred to her to do so.

"She ran for the telephone, as a person in the water would seize upon the first plank thrown out, and he fired at her as she reached it, or while she was using it, or—no; she could not have torn that instrument from the wall as it has been torn down. She had not the strength, and her weight was not sufficient to have done it.

"Ah! I see it now."

He left his seat and crossed the room to the wrecked instrument again, examining it with more care than

he had devoted to it in the first instance; then he returned to his seat near the cot.

"I see it now," he repeated, "and it is very simple. She did recognize his voice when he called to her from the outside; she did know who was there, and she did realize her immediate danger.

"Instead of opening the door to admit him, the young woman left it as it was and ran to the telephone to give the alarm. The intruder perhaps was the man who one time had put that wedding ring on her finger, and he had a key to that door—a circumstance that she momentarily must have forgotten; or, what is still more likely than all else, she heard his approach, feared that it might be he, and went to the telephone while he still was rapping at the door, and so succeeded in saying something over the wire before he entered.

"I assume, then, that he made use of his key, and entered, and that he discovered the young woman in the act of telephoning, and, not knowing how much or how little she had already succeeded in saying, shot her down the moment he found her so.

"And then, when she fell to the floor—perhaps she feigned death or unconsciousness, or really fainted from terror—he seized the instrument and tore it from the wall; and then, while he was engaged in that act, she leaped to her feet and ran out of the house.

"That must be how it happened. And he pursued her, knowing well the direction she would take. She ran, knowing doubtless that he must have come here on horseback, and she hoped that she could find the horse and ride away before he could overtake her.

"So they reached the spot where he shot her a second time—where he fired the shot that Danny and I heard.

"Even then it did not occur to her to cry for help—never dreaming that help could be near at hand, but she screamed, and cried out, 'Don't! Don't!'

"Believing that he had killed her, as he came here to do, he sprang upon the horse and rode away down the road, never supposing that he was seen.

"Well, if the young woman did any talking at all over that telephone wire, it could not have been very much in the time that was allotted her; but, whatever it was that she said, the office with which that wire is connected probably will know something about it—and it won't be very much trouble to find that office."

The famous detective left his chair again and began opening drawers, and searching things generally.

He found several receipted telephone bills made out in the name of Mrs. E. T. Cooley, but no letters, nor indeed anything else bearing a woman's name.

Some of the handkerchiefs he found in the dresser were initialed E. T. C., and others were initialed with a single B. The sterling silver toilet articles were monogramed E. T. B., there being only one that was marked E. T. C., and that one old and worn.

And so Patsy assumed that the young woman's maiden name had been Cooley; that she had elected to live there at the top of the mountain known only as Mrs. Cooley, while her married name, which remained unrevealed, began with a B.

Nowhere could Patsy discover a single indication that her husband, or any other person, such as a servant or companion, had resided there with her.

And all the time, while he was studying and considering, the woman remained in that state of coma from which she showed no signs of rousing.

Then Danny returned and announced that the road was clear.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE DEAD WHO CANNOT SPEAK.

The small village three miles down the mountain, to which reference has been made, was called Cranberry. Just why it was called that does not appear, for there was not a cranberry bog nearer than Cape Cod, in Massachusetts, so far as the inhabitants were aware; and it was a community, rather than a village, the country around it being settled by semirich people who had erected residences and improved the neighborhood, and had petitioned that a post office be established there.

The car that Danny drove for Patsy that night was Nick Carter's roadster, and there was no tonneau in which to dispose Mrs. Cooley comfortably while they descended the steep and rough road from the top of the mountain.

But Patsy wrapped the wounded woman in all the blankets he could find, leaving only a space for her to breathe, and he wound a clothesline loosely around it all to hold the coverings in place. He held her in the seat beside Danny, while they made their way, with such haste as they dared to use, to Cranberry.

Nevertheless, it was after two in the morning when they arrived at Cranberry, and they drove slowly along the main street, which was lined on both sides with ornate residences and grounds. The trees and lawns showed the effects of the violence of the storm which still was raging. The front of each house was searched with the acetylene headlight for a doctor's sign. They found one, and Danny got out to rouse the physician,

while Patsy remained in the car with the unconscious young woman.

The wounded woman was finally carried into the house, where the doctor and his wife gave her the attention she required. The doctor's own chauffeur was called into service, to accompany Patsy and Danny into the village, half a mile farther on, to find the telephone exchange.

They found all that was left of it, which wasn't much, as far as Patsy's requirements of the moment were concerned. An item in a newspaper which recorded the news of Cranberry, and which was printed a day or two later, will explain what we mean by that reference. It said:

"The telephone exchange at Cranberry, located in a small building at the south end of Cranberry Street, was wrecked by the storm last Wednesday night, and Miss Carruthers, the operator, was injured so severely that she died three hours later, etc., etc."

They found a heap of wreckage where the telephone exchange had been, and they were told by the village constable, whom they afterward sought out, that Miss Carruthers had been so severely injured by the falling walls of the little building that she was not expected to survive another hour. And she did not.

The person whose affidavit Patsy was intent upon securing in reference to the errand that had taken him to that locality that night lived just outside of Cranberry, and was, in fact, one of the prominent men of the place; so Patsy and Danny sought the local hotel and retired for the balance of the night, tired out by their exertions.

The doctor at whose home the patient had been left supplied them, the following morning, with all the information that anybody possessed in reference to Mrs. Cooley.

"She came here," he told Patsy, "sixteen months ago, and took possession of that lonely old house at the top of the mountain. It happens that I own it, so she leased it from me."

"Won't you tell me what information she gave you about herself at the time?" Patsy inquired.

"Practically none at all. It was apparent to all that she was a woman of refinement. She told me that she was an artist, and she afterward demonstrated the truth of that. I have one of her paintings, which she gave to me about a year ago."

"She was well provided with money?" Patsy asked.

"Always. The impression around here was that she was a rich woman, and that idea has not been changed. She always had plenty of money. But she was voted 'queer.' She always declined each neighborly advance that was made toward her, and has kept herself entirely aloof from us all. Very few of the women ventured to call upon her, and those who did so did not go to see her a second time."

"Why not?"

"Because she showed so plainly that she did not wish them to do so. She was not discourteous; but a person doesn't have to be that in order to let another one know that he or she is not wanted."

"No."

"She had that telephone—with its three miles of wire—installed at her little home, at her own expense, and she paid Miss Carruthers for certain services that the poor girl rendered in the way of errands. In fact, Miss Carruthers was the only person here who had the freedom of Mrs. Cooley's house, or who was at all in her confidence."

"And Miss Carruthers is dead?"

"Yes—poor lass. She was a very superior girl—an orphan, though."

"And you tell me that there is no chance that Mrs. Cooley will live?"

"None at all. She cannot live until night."

"Would it have been better had I left her there in the care of Danny, and come here after you, doctor?"

"No. She could not have lived in any case. The skull is fractured. Death was a foregone conclusion the instant the bullet struck her."

"Is anything known as to the source of her supply of money?"

"Not a thing. She kept an account at our local bank, of which I am a director. There was usually a balance to her credit there of several thousand dollars; but she always made her deposits in cash, never by check."

"But she checked against her account, of course."

"She has never made a check to another person since she has kept the account. If she was in need of funds she drew a check payable to 'self' and cashed it herself; then she paid her bills in cash."

"The postmaster might give me some information as to letters and——"

"The postmaster is the son of a distant relative of mine, and I secured his appointment. He has told me more than once that Mrs. Cooley never has received or posted a letter at this office, during the sixteen months she has been in this neighborhood."

"She certainly held herself in seclusion, doctor."

"She most surely did, Mr. Garvan."

"How did she get to and from the village to her home when she had occasion to do so?"

"Again it is Miss Carruthers, her only companion and confidante."

"How do you mean?"

"Mrs. Cooley owned a runabout. It was kept here in the village, and Miss Carruthers had charge of it. When Mrs. Cooley came here, Miss Carruthers did all the work of the telephone exchange herself, and this was installed in the house where she lived. Mrs. Cooley employed an assistant for Miss Carruthers, who thus was able to absent herself from the office whenever she desired to do so."

"In order that Miss Carruthers might be able to respond to any demand that Mrs. Cooley might make upon her?"

"Precisely."

"I understand."

"In pleasant weather, Miss Carruthers drove out to Mrs. Cooley's every afternoon. Sometimes she and Mrs. Cooley would drive the little car over the country roads. Miss Carruthers always took out supplies to her as they were needed."

"So there is no way of obtaining any further information about the woman?"

'None at all that I know of, unless——"

"Well?"

"There are a few safe-deposit boxes in a vault of our bank, and Mrs. Cooley held one of them. It is possible that the box may contain something of interest—only, of course, that cannot be opened until we have found a will directing who shall do so, or, in the event of no such document being found, until an administrator is appointed by the courts."

"On the contrary, doctor."

"Eh? How is that?"

"If there is a will, it probably is in that safe-deposit box. The directors of the bank should make application at once, in the case of her death, which you say is practically assured——"

"Yes."

"The directors should apply to the court at once for permission to open that box. Don't forget, doctor, that the moment that woman is dead this affair becomes a case of murder."

"I know. You are right. I will attend to it at once."

The nurse, who had been in the room with the patient, summoned the doctor. Ten minutes later he returned to Patsy and said:

"It is all over, Mr. Garvan. She is dead."

"Poor woman," said Patsy, turning away.

"Aye, poor woman. It is a sad case—a very sad case."

"Doctor, did you never hear of any man being seen with Mrs. Cooley, or near her lonely home on the mountain?"

"Never. Such a thing would have been reported in the village at once, and gossiped about, too, if you know anything about what a place in the country is like."

"Oh, I know."

"Miss Carruthers was the only person who would have known of such a circumstance, if one happened, and she is beyond telling."

"Doctor, I am going to ask you to do me a favor."

"I will, if I can. What is it?"

"First, let me tell you who I am."

"Yes; thank you."

"I am an assistant to Nick Carter, the detective. I think he is rather well known around this neighborhood, because of an affair at Barrington—thirty or forty miles from here—that happened about six or eight months ago."

"Oh, yes, I know. Well?"

"I have already explained to you just how it happened that I came upon this affair last night."

"Yes."

"Well, it has interested me. I haven't much time to stay here. I must be getting on; but if you will induce the directors of your bank to open that safe-deposit box of Mrs. Cooley's—in the presence of all of them, and of such other citizens as they will select—I will remain here until that is done, and until we know the contents of it."

"I think it can be done, Mr. Garvan," replied the doctor hesitatingly.

"Of course it can be done. It should be done. Justice demands it."

"It shall be done. I will see to it."

"Thank you."

"Meet me at the bank in two hours from now, Mr. Garvan."

"I will be there. And, doctor."

"Yes?"

"What about the disposal of the dead woman?"

"I will take entire charge of all that matter, Mr. Garvan," was the reply.

"Anyhow, Danny," said Patsy, as they were leaving the house, "I am going back again to that old house on the mountain before the day is over."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE BOX AT THE SAFE DEPOSIT.

Nine men were gathered around the oak table in the directors' room of the Cranberry Bank. Two of the nine were Patsy and Danny. The remaining seven comprised the five directors of the bank, which was a private one; the sheriff of the county, and a justice of the supreme court, who happened to reside in the locality.

After a few necessary formalities, the nine men marched solemnly to the safe-deposit vault, and the box that had been rented in the name of Mrs. Eleanor Trent Cooley was opened.

It was found to contain a tin box, of the kind that is ordinarily used for the accommodation of legal papers. In this were two sealed envelopes.

The contents of the compartment were removed, and the president of the bank picked up the envelopes, and read aloud the inscriptions that were written upon them.

The first, a large envelope of thick tan paper, contained this writing on the outside:

"The Last Will and Testament of Eleanor Trent Cooley-Bixby. To be opened, after my death, by Doctor Charles Coddington, who is appointed my sole executor."

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed the doctor, as the envelope was passed to him. "I had no idea of such a circumstance, gentlemen."

"We understand that perfectly well," replied the president of the bank. "This second envelope is addressed to you, in person, doctor, and is marked, 'To be opened only in the event of my death,' and is signed, E. T. Cooley,' precisely as she signed her checks. Will you read what it contains?"

The doctor took the letter, opened it, and read it slowly to himself; then he cleared his throat, and read aloud. It was as follows:

"My Dear Doctor Coddington: I have taken the liberty, without consulting you on the subject, to appoint you the sole executor of my will, which leaves everything that I possess to Bertha Carruthers; or, in the event of her death before this is read, to the several charities I have named. If the contents of the tin box should astonish you, remember that I am a strange woman, friendless and alone, and that one of my peculiar qualities has been to retain, as I have done, the valuable stones you find. I ask only that, as my executor, you will purchase a burial lot for me in the cemetery of the church you attend, and that I be laid to rest there, and forgotten. My married name is Bixby, but I prefer that it, too, be forgotten. There are no relatives to inquire about me, or mourn for me. On the stone, you will place at the head of my grave, have inscribed only: 'Eleanor Trent Cooley, who died when life had just begun.' Omit the date because I have been virtually dead more than four years already—if you can understand what I mean by so strange a statement. I am very grateful for everything that I know you will do for me.

"(Signed) Eleanor Trent Cooley."

The key to the tin box was inside the letter to the doctor, and, in the utter silence that followed what he had read, he opened it and threw back the lid.

Then he uttered an exclamation of amazement, and well he might have done so, for it was a glittering array of precious stones—diamonds, rubies, emeralds, pearls, sapphires, and other gems—that he saw there.

There were five one-thousand-dollar bills lying upon the top of the heap.

There was not a mounted stone in the lot, although many of them had the appearance of having once been mounted. All were loose, and had been placed in the box.

"It is amazing," exclaimed the doctor.

Patsy reached out for the will, after the doctor had read it through in silence, and read it to the end, but there was nothing in it that need be recorded here.

He returned it. He parted his lips to say something, and closed them again, determined to say nothing. It was better that the value of the stones should go to the selected charities than to be locked up uselessly somewhere until the end of time, for need of ownership.

So he said nothing—until later in the day, when he was again in the car beside Danny, and they were climbing up the mountain toward the house where Mrs. Cooley had lived.

"Those diamonds and the other precious stones were stolen, Danny," he said, then.

Danny nodded.

He had heard more or less of the talk in the detective's home about the career of one Jimmy Bemis, alias Bixby, and he, as well as Patsy, had immediately associated with the thief the married name of the dead woman who had died so mysteriously.

They rode on in silence for another quarter of a mile, then Patsy said:

"And Mrs. Eleanor Trent Cooley-Bixby was the wife of Jimmy Bemis Bixby."

Danny nodded again. Words were unnecessary.

"Well!" Patsy muttered. "Dead men cannot commit murder, in the dead of night."

"No."

"And it's a case of a thousand to one that that woman's husband killed her. Eh?"

"Yes."

"Then—take it from me, Danny—Jimmy Bemis is not dead."

"Not likely—if she was the wife of Jimmy Bemis."

"He is—or was, last night—as much alive as you are."

"It looks like it."

"I wonder who that woman was trying to call up on the phone at the time she was attacked."

"Why, Miss Carruthers, of course."

"No, Danny. That would be the natural supposition; but it's another case of a thousand to one that she wanted somebody else; or, anyhow, that Miss Carruthers was told to tell somebody else the message she talked over the wire."

"What do you mean by that?" Danny asked.

"I mean that I'd be willing to bet a whole lot—if there was any way to prove it—that the woman was trying to get word to somebody that Jimmy Bemis is alive. Maybe she had time to tell the whole story, or nearly all of it, to Miss Carruthers."

"Maybe she did; but Miss Carruthers is dead, and she can't tell."

"Well, turn the car around and go back."

"To Cranberry?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I want to search about among those ruins of the telephone exchange."

"For what?" He was turning the car while they talked.

"For a written memorandum. There wasn't any fire to burn things."

"No; but there was plenty of water to soak 'em."

Patsy drew a pencil from one of his pockets and looked at it.

"I picked this up among the ruins of that office this morning," he said. "It is an indelible pencil—one of the sort that makes a mark that changes to ink, when moistened. If Miss Carruthers used such a pencil as——"

"And if all the paper that was there isn't reduced to a mere spitball," said Danny, when Patsy hesitated.

"Precisely. What time was it when that little building blew down?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask."

"Well, it is worth finding out."

"Why?"

"Because, as nearly as I can figure it out, Mrs. Cooley used her telephone, or tried to use it, just a little before midnight. Perhaps she was telling Miss Carruthers all about her terrors at the very moment when the exchange blew down."

"Possibly."

"Or had finished telling it, and Miss Carruthers already had told it to somebody else."

"In that case, the 'somebody else' would have shown up here, or sent word before this."

"Possibly. Anyhow, if the woman on the mountain wished Miss Carruthers to telephone a message to another person, Miss Carruthers would have made a note of the name or the number."

"Very likely."

Danny sent the car spinning along at a lively rate until they were again before the scene of the wrecked building. It had been a small, one-story, frame structure, formerly used as the office of a public weighing scales until the needs of the telephone service called for it, and it had stood on a corner with bare spaces all around it, where it had been particularly exposed to the sweep of the wind.

Curiosity concerning it had abated in the village, and there was nobody about when Patsy and Danny descended from the car and began to search among the ruins.

The little building had simply collapsed.

The wind had evidently raised the roof several feet into the air, then released its hold upon it, and dropped it back. Its weight had crushed the flimsy structure as if it had been an empty eggshell.

Patsy crawled inside of the place through an opening he found, and on his hands and knees made his way to the point which he judged to be the spot where the exchange board had been located. It was right there that axes had been used on the fallen roof to extricate the injured operator.

Everything had been locked, of course, and such scraps of paper as he succeeded in finding were very much in the condition so graphically suggested by Danny.

Nevertheless, he searched diligently, pulling aside fragments of the wreckage as he did so.

Presently he came upon a solid pad of blank paper, five inches by three, which had doubtless been used by the operator for hastily made memoranda.

As he picked this up and turned it over, he uttered a sharp exclamation.

"What have you found?" Danny called from outside.

"Wait," Patsy replied; and he crawled outside, holding the pad of paper in his hand.

"What is it?" Danny asked.

"This!" replied Patsy, and gave him the pad to look at.

It was blank, save for one name that had been written upon it, and that name was—"Nick Carter."

"What do you think of that for a find?" Patsy asked.

"I don't know," was the reply.

"Wait!" said Patsy. "Here comes the doctor. I want to ask him a question that I think he will be able to answer."

## CHAPTER IX.

### A MEMORANDUM IN INDELIBLE INK.

Patsy and Danny met the doctor at the curb, where the car was standing.

"I supposed that you had left town," said the physician.

"We did leave; but we returned," replied the young detective. "I told you about the condition in which we found the telephone instrument, in the house on the mountain, doctor?"

"Yes."

"Well, since the information you gave to me regarding the character of the intimacy between Mrs. Cooley and Miss Carruthers, it occurred to me that the woman up there might have been telephoning some directions to the operator. So I returned to look for a possible memorandum."

"Did you find one?"

"I found the name 'Nick Carter' written on this pad of paper. There it is."

"Um-m-m!" said the doctor, pursing his lips thoughtfully. "Miss Carruthers always kept beside her just such a pad as this one when she was at the board, and this name is in her handwriting, which is well known to me."

"Good! That settles that part of it. Now, is there any way in which we can ascertain the exact time when this building was blown down?"

"Why, yes; across the street—at Doctor Greeley's. He attended her. I believe he was the first one to reach the spot after the building collapsed."

"Will you go over there with me?"

"Surely! There is the doctor now, coming out of the house."

They crossed the street together and met Doctor Greeley at his gate. Patsy asked him at once:

"Doctor Greeley, will you give me, as nearly as possible, the exact time when that little building over there collapsed? If there is any circumstance by which you can fix the time, I will be glad if you can recall it to mind."

"It was less than a minute after midnight, by the town clock yonder," was the reply, and Doctor Greeley pointed to a clock dial on the tower of the fire house. Then he added: "I had been making a late call, afoot. The fire-house clock was striking twelve when I turned in at my gate, and I heard the crash of the collapsing building just a moment after I had closed my front door. I ran back out at once, and, across the street, knowing that Miss Carruthers was inside the little place, and must have been injured, if not killed."

"So, it was less than a minute past midnight?"

"Yes."

Patsy compared the time of his watch with the clock on the tower.

"It would have been two minutes past twelve by my time," he said. "Thank you."

"Have you discovered anything interesting?" Doctor Coddington asked, when the other physician had hurried on his way.

"That depends, doctor. I don't know yet. I don't suppose there is a telephone in commission in the whole place, is there?"

"No. I think not. The wires are pretty generally down, besides the collapse of the exchange."

"How about the telegraph office?"

"I happen to know that their New York wire is working all right. I just received a message over it."

"Good! Danny, we'll drive to the telegraph office before we make another start. Much obliged to you, doctor."

"Wait a moment. I assume, naturally, that you are going to make an effort to trace the murderer of Mrs. Cooley?"

"Yes."

"If I can aid you in any way, will you call upon me?"

"Certainly; although I very much doubt if you can be of service."

"Will you favor me so far as to keep me posted in regard to what you are doing?"

"I will let you know if we find the man, if that is what you mean."

"Yes. Thank you. The funeral of Mrs. Cooley, and of Miss Carruthers, will take place at the same time

—the day after to-morrow, at two in the afternoon. Will you attend?"

"Perhaps. But if I am not here, some person will represent me—or, at least, who will represent Nick Carter. Still, I doubt if the murderer will attend the funeral."

"No; it isn't likely," said the doctor, as he went on his way.

Patsy and Danny drove at once to the telegraph office, where the former sent the following message to his chief:

"Affidavit signed and forwarded this morning by mail, with letter which explains itself. Did you receive telephonic communication from Cranberry about midnight last night? Will call you on telephone soon as possible for further information on this point. Wires down now. Have reason to suspect Bemis lives."

When the telegram was sent, the car was started again up the mountain road toward the little home where Eleanor Cooley had lived, and where the great tragedy of her life had occurred.

The authorities in Cranberry had not only freely placed the investigation of the case in the hands of Patsy, but had urged him to find and arrest the murderer, if it were possible to do so.

In the letter that Patsy wrote to his chief that morning, referred to in the telegram, he had recounted at length the occurrences of the preceding night, although it had not at that time occurred to him that Jimmy Bemis lived, and that the dead woman had been his wife. Now, however, he felt certain of it.

During the preceding night, when Patsy was at the house on the mountain, he had not made more than a superficial search of the premises. There had been no opportunity to do more than that; and the moment when Danny had appeared to announce that the way down the mountain was open to them, and that the car could proceed on its way, he had abandoned even that, in his eagerness to get the stricken woman to a physician.

It was his intention now to make a more thorough search of the place, not only inside the house, but around it, and in that locality generally.

It was not likely that the husband of the woman, whoever he might have been, had lived in that house with her, or had stopped there for any definite time; otherwise, the people at the village would have heard about it.

But it was extremely likely, particularly in the light of what had occurred, that he had known of her occupancy of the house, and that he could find her there at any time he might choose to do so.

The presence of the diamonds in the tin box locked inside the safe-deposit vault was fairly good circumstantial evidence that the man was Bemis—that same Bemis who had acknowledged to the name of Bixby at one time in his career.

Jimmy Bemis, alias Bixby, had been a burglar. His specialty had been jewels. What was more likely than that he had given her handfuls of stones at a time to keep for him, or that he had bestowed them upon her at a time when he had loved her, and before she had known of his felonious calling?

Was the fact that she had discovered what he really was her reason for leaving him? And did that account for her determination to withdraw herself from the world and to live alone in the seclusion of her isolated mountain home?

Did she know, in the beginning, that the diamonds had been stolen, or had she learned of it too late to admit of any possibility of their restoration to the rightful owners?

Patsy knew that he was even then in the vicinity of the last activities of Jimmy Bemis.

Mrs. Cooley had occupied the house on the mountain about sixteen months—which was about the time that Bemis had resided in Barrington.

Had she gone there and taken that house on the mountain to escape him, believing that she had selected a place where there would be little likelihood that he would find her? Had he followed her, and selected his next place for the commission of his robberies at Barrington, in order to be near her?

And then he again asked himself the question that was really uppermost in his mind all the time: Had Mrs. Cooley, or Bemis, really called up Nick Carter over the telephone that night, or had she sought to do so? Had she directed her one friend, the operator at the telephone exchange, to do so for her?

What had she known about Nick Carter to induce her to appeal to him in that last extremity to which she had been reduced?

And it should be said here to the reader, who knows more of the circumstances than either Patsy or Nick Carter knew at the moment, that, during the day, while Patsy had been so busily employed, Chick had carried out the orders of the chief, and had succeeded in communicating with Phyllis Baxter's sister, Edith; to discover if it were Phyllis Baxter who had attempted to make use of the telephone the preceding night at midnight.

"No," Edith Baxter had said to Chick, in reply to his question, "I am absolutely positive that it was not my sister who called on the phone. She is not at home at the present moment, but I can assure you of that much, on general principles."

"Could you give me her address?" Chick asked.

"No. Not without her permission. She is visiting friends in New Jersey. But she telephoned home last night, before the storm. She was all right then, and must be so now."

"Will you communicate with her to-day and let us know if anything is wrong?"

"Yes."

Chick was not entirely satisfied with that, and called up Roger Graham at the country club address in New Jersey that had long before been given to the detective.

"Mr. Graham," he said, as soon as that gentleman was at the phone, "this is the residence of Nick Carter. Last night, during the storm, Mr. Carter was called to the telephone by a lady who did not succeed in giving her message. Something interfered with the wires before she could complete it, but Mr. Carter heard enough to suppose that it might have been Miss Baxter who sought to communicate with him. Do you, by any possibility, know if that is so?"

"I am sure that it is not so—at least, I am reasonably sure of it," was the reply. "I saw Miss Baxter last night before the storm, and less than half an hour ago I telephoned a message to her at the house where she is staying. She was not at the phone to receive it, but she was in the house, or in the immediate vicinity. I assume that from the manner in which my message was received to be transmitted to her."

"Thank you," said Chick. "Nevertheless, when you see her again, will you ask the question, and then inform Mr. Carter in either case if it were, or were not, she who telephoned?"

"Certainly. What was it all about?"

"That is what Mr. Carter wishes to know. He did not get enough of the message to find out," replied Chick.

It was about a half hour later—just at the time when Patsy and Danny were getting out of the roadster in front of the house on the mountain where the tragedy had occurred, when the telegram that Patsy had sent was delivered to the detective.

He read it with amazement, and knitted his brows over that last sentence it contained:

"Have reason to suspect Demis lives."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE THIRTEEN HEADS.

The day after the great storm was such a one as is apt to follow upon a season of violent weather.

Instead of being like November, it was warm, sunny, and bright, suggesting the month of May at its best in all save the condition of the trees and foliage.

Everywhere, however, there were scenes of wreckage.

Huge branches lay across the highway, trees had been torn up by the roots, and others had been blasted by lightning. Old buildings had been unroofed or blown down utterly, and new buildings in the course of construction had been demolished.

On the mountain, near the house of tragedy, the violence of the storm had reached its height, but the house itself had escaped unscathed, as had also the one outbuilding which stood fifty feet away from it at the rear. This building Patsy speedily discovered had been utilized as a storehouse by Mrs. Cooley. It was made of logs, and had an earthen floor.

At the cottage itself Patsy threw wide the four windows and the door, letting in the light of the sun and the pure air of the mountain.

That little home which the woman had made so cozy and cheerful was a pathetic thing to contemplate, for on every hand were the evidences of her daily occupations, which had consisted chiefly in reading and in painting.

Canvasses of half-completed work were everywhere, standing face to back against the sides of the one big room. Bits of dainty embroidery here and there, and an embroidery ring, with a half-finished centerpiece of exquisite design, evidenced how Eleanor Cooley had occupied her time when neither books nor her art attracted her.

But nowhere was there a scrap of paper with writing upon it, except for a few unimportant memoranda of articles to be purchased.

Although Patsy searched every corner of the place, every drawer and closet, every cupboard and receptacle, nowhere did he come upon a letter that had been written to the woman, or even so much as the scrap of one that she had written to another. The storehouse already referred to gave him no better results in his search.

Then he began to look about him for secret hiding places, for it was out of all reason that a woman should live so alone that she never communicated with a single soul outside of one chosen confidante whom

she could have seen only rarely—Miss Carruthers; and that if she did so live, she should have made no record of her life in the form of a diary, or a journal.

There were books galore, and paintings in all stages of evolution, and there were pastels, drawings, and sketches, many of which had been only begun, and had not progressed far enough to show what they were intended to be.

Patsy gave little heed to these, at first; but when all else in the way of search produced nothing, he gave his attention to them again.

All the while he was searching the place the name of Bemis kept repeating itself to his mind, like the suggestion of a ghost that pursued him no matter what move he made.

"Bemis, Bemis, Bemis!"

He was possessed by the sound of it, although, in thinking of the name, he made no sound aloud; and then he came upon the rough drawing that made him pause and wonder.

It was little more than an unfinished sketch. He placed it upon a chair near a window, so that the best light fell across it; then he stood back and studied the face that it portrayed. Danny was near him.

"I wonder if that is Bemis?" Patsy said.

"He is a good-looking chap, if it is," was Danny's comment.

The sketch was of a handsome man, of strong face, large, intellectual head, and fine bearing.

"It may be only an ideal head that she has drawn," said Patsy. "Artists do that sort of thing, you know; or they draw from memory some head that they have seen, idealizing it into what it might have been without the imperfections that an artist is quick to discover."

"There is another one, something like that, under a heap of rubbish, out in the storehouse," said Danny. "I just found it."

"Is there? Get it, and bring it here."

Danny ran after the other one that he had mentioned, and stood it beside the one that Patsy had found.

"It's the same head, made from the same model, or from a memory of him," was Patsy's comment.

Danny nodded.

"Over there, in that far corner, is a sketch of Mephistopheles," he said. "I think that is the same face, too;" and he went after it, brought forward another chair, and stood it beside the other two.

"Sure enough," said Patsy, when he saw it. "Here, Danny."

"Yes."

"Dig out of the lot all the heads you can find, no matter what they represent. Bring them here, and stand them on chairs in a row, so that we can compare them. I'll help you."

It was not long before every chair in the room had been utilized, each holding two or three of the drawings. One was an oil painting, and across the face of this a brush, wet with brown, rust-colored paint, had been drawn again and again, first in horizontal and then in perpendicular lines, half an inch apart, so that the features of the original painting were almost obliterated.

But enough could be seen of them to convince both the observers that the picture had been of the same man; and while they were studying it, Danny exclaimed:

"I say, do you know what that thing means?"

"Yes," replied Patsy. "It means that she has stricken out the face, as one strikes out a written word that has become superfluous."

"No. That isn't it," said Danny.

"What, then?"

"She has put him behind bars."

"By Jove! I guess you are right, Danny."

"Sure thing!"

"There are thirteen of those heads, of the same man."

"Yes. I counted 'em. Thirteen is an unlucky number, isn't it?"

"Some people think so. I do not. It happens to be a lucky number for us, just now, for it has afforded us pretty good proof that we are looking upon different aspects of the face of the man we want for murder."

"Right you are; but the chief knows the face, anyway, doesn't he?"

"No. That's the trouble. He does not."

"I thought he had seen the man."

"The chief saw a dead man who was supposed to be Bemis. The face, however, had been crushed in by a rock upon which he was thrown when his automobile was wrecked. It appears now that that dead man was not Bemis at all."

"Then—say, maybe he didn't fall on the rock at all."

"Eh?"

"Maybe the rock fell on him. Maybe it was thrown. Maybe that affair last night was not the first murder he has committed."

"Right you are, Danny. You'll make a detective yet."

"I hope so. Say!"

"Well?"

"I want to talk about that accident—when Bemis was supposed to have been killed. I've got an idea, if I am only a chauffeur."

"Go ahead," replied Patsy, smiling. "I don't know why chauffeurs are not to have ideas, as well as others."

"Well, I have heard you and the chief, and you and Chick, and Chick and the chief, talk quite a lot about that affair, at one time and another, and I have remembered most of it."

"All right. What about it?"

"As nearly as I can make out, there were two unknown men in that deal that night. I refer to the time when Bemis was killed—or was supposed to be killed, since you have decided that he wasn't."

"Well?"

"Am I right?"

"About the two unknown men? Yes—in a sense."

"In what sense? Or, rather, let me tell you what I mean by there being two unknown men."

"Go ahead."

"It was only the people of the town of Barrington who knew Bemis, as he called himself, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"And they knew him only as he had lived among them—while he was robbing their houses. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"And only two of them went over to Logan's Corners that time to identify him?"

"Yes."

"A man named Spaulding and another?"

"Correct."

"And the face of the dead man was so crushed in that perfect identification was impossible, and, as a matter of fact, the identification was made from the clothing, the swag, and the circumstance, and not from absolute recognition. Is that right?"

"It is."

"Well, there isn't anything to show that Bemis wasn't wearing some sort of a disguise all the time he was living openly in Barrington, is there?"

"No."

"Now, take the other unknown man. That was Hadley, the chauffeur who had engaged himself to Mr. Roger Graham, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Graham had never seen him till that night in the dark, had he?"

"No."

"Nor Miss Baxter had not seen him till that night in the dark, had she?"

"No."

"Well——"

"You forget one important item, Danny—that is if you are trying to tell me that the chauffeur, Hadley, might have been the dead man, and that the present Hadley is now the real Bemis. You forget that both Mr. Graham and Miss Baxter have seen him almost constantly since that time. Six months have passed since the supposed death of Bemis, and, as far as I know and have reason to believe, Paul Hadley is still working as chauffeur for Graham."

"All the same, I've got a hunch that Hadley is Bemis," said Danny.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### DANNY EXPOUNDS A THEORY.

"That's a far-fetched idea of yours, Danny. It is practically an impossible solution of the affair."

"Maybe so; all the same, a fellow has a right to his own opinion."

"Of course."

"Look here, Patsy—I don't often call you that, but I want to just now."

"Go ahead."

"As I understand the situation, as it was then, Graham had bought a new car, and had hired a new chauffeur with the purchase."

"That is a precise statement of the fact. Well?"

"He never had seen the chauffeur he hired, and who was taking the car to him on a hurry order the night of the collision, when the car that Graham was driving, with Miss Baxter in the seat beside him, and the car that Hadley was driving alone, came together, were smashed and burned up, both of them, on the road between Barrington and Logan's Corners."

"Correct."

"Now, as I heard the story little by little as you have talked it over between you at the house and when I have been driving you in one of the cars, Hadley landed on his feet that night, and wasn't hurt a little bit."

"Correct again."

"Mr. Graham landed on his back in the soft grass, and Miss Baxter fell on him. He had the wind

knocked out of him, and his right wrist was sprained. The young woman wasn't hurt at all. Eh?"

"That was the condition of things."

"And then the three of them stood on the bank beside the road and watched the burning cars until a chap came along in a roadster, and took Miss Baxter and Hadley to Logan's Corners, while Graham stayed where he was to wait till Hadley got a conveyance of some sort and went back after him. Is that it?"

"Yes."

"The chap who picked up Hadley and the girl, and who said he was a doctor on a hurry order, really was Bemis, wasn't he? And wasn't Nick Carter after him right then?"

"Yes. Go on."

"And a little while afterward the chief happened along the road in his own car—this one that we've got with us now—picked up Graham, and carried him to the Corners; and then they found that Bemis had run away with Miss Baxter, and they all took after her, the chief going on alone in his car, and the others chasing him later, in a hired car; and at that place you call the Dublin road Hadley was left afoot to follow along while Graham went around by another road in the hired car. The chief already had passed that way, and all the time the car that Bemis had used was lying under the ledge almost at their feet. We must remember, too, that all this time the girl must have been lying gagged and bound not very far away from them, and that there wasn't a soul in sight when Graham and Hadley and the hired man who drove them arrived at the top of that Dublin road hill."

"I declare, Danny, I did not suppose you had it all down as fine as that; but you are correct in everything you have said."

"Well, then, here are a few points about it, as I see them."

"Get 'em out of your system, Danny."

"First, when the girl rode to the Corners with Bemis and Hadley, Hadley rode behind her, in the bucket seat of the rumble, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"And when he jumped out at the hotel at the Corners to call the proprietor, Bemis ran off with her; so the only chance Miss Baxter had had to see him was in the light of the burning cars, back at the scene of the wreck, when she was probably pretty well rattled."

"Well, Danny?"

"The only chances that Graham had to see him were at this time and during the ride in the hired car, when they followed the chief. All that time, however, Mr. Graham was thinking a heap more about the girl than about the man beside him, to say nothing of the fact that he had been pretty badly shaken up at the time he had collided with the car occupied by the real Hadley."

"He probably had been rather well shaken up, Danny."

"Well, I heard the chief say to you that if it wasn't for this, and if it wasn't for that, and if it wasn't for the other thing, and so on, he'd be of the opinion that Bemis had purposely wrecked his own car at the top of that Dublin road, and had hidden himself there till the pursuing cars had passed, in order to make good his escape. The chief did say that, didn't he?"

"He did."

"Now, suppose that Bemis did that very thing; suppose that he had tied up the girl so that she couldn't move or speak; suppose that he was hidden there when the chief drove by and went on down that hill; suppose he was still there when the other car came, and when Hadley got out alone, and stayed there while the car he had been in went on and left him there alone."

"I see what you are gettting at, Danny."

"I'm not through yet."

"Go on."

"Suppose that Mr. Bemis saw his opportunity right then and there? It was mighty dark in those woods at the top of the hill that night—almost as dark as it was here last night."

"Probably."

"Now, suppose again, that Bemis already had noticed that he and Hadley were about of the same build and general make-up, and suppose he had overheard enough talk to know that the girl and Graham didn't know Hadley from sole leather."

"Well?"

"Then, suppose that when Hadley was left there alone in the dark, without a suspicion that anybody was anywhere near him, Bemis picked up a rock as big as he could lift and handle, crept up to Hadley, and smashed him with it, plumb in the face. Say, what do you think of that?"

"It is plausible—the way you put it, Danny. I'll admit that."

"And Bemis and Hadley didn't have to look so very much alike, in fact; and all that Bemis had to do was to make an exchange of caps and automobile coats, to make him look enough like Hadley to pass for him, maybe."

"Possibly."

"And then he could have chucked the body of the man he had killed over the ledge on the top of the wreck, as if the man had been killed in falling there with it; and then he could untie the girl, and take the gag out of her mouth, pretending all the while that he was Hadley who had found her—and it's a hundred-to-one shot that she wouldn't know the difference, for the very good reason that she had no occasion to suspect there was a difference."

"There is a great deal in what you are saying, Danny," said Patsy, with all seriousness.

"And what I say would account for the murder last night, wouldn't it?"

"Yes. It would."

"Well, I'm not a detective; but that is my idea, all the same. Take it, or leave it."

"I think, Danny, that I will adopt it—for want of a better one. There are some strong objections to it, however."

"What are they?"

"Well, even supposing that Bemis could safely impose himself upon Graham and the girl, there were probably others upon whom he could not impose."

"Maybe so; only, until you know that, what's the use talking about it?"

"Because we must cover all the ground in the adoption of a theory. Hadley, as a chauffeur, was probably not without friends and acquaintances—and relatives."

"Right-o; but he didn't have to meet those friends and acquaintances and relatives in the presence of Graham or the girl or the relatives. The fact is that he would not be at all likely to meet with any of them."

"That is true."

"Even supposing he had a mother—and a mother would be the one to know him, if anybody—he could keep away from her, or he could make an excuse for not writing to her, and—oh, a clever man could have carried out such a deception, situated as he was, in a thousand different ways."

"You are right, Danny. It could be done."

"And, another thing."

"Well?"

"There was a woman up here whom we suppose to have been his wife."

"Yes."

"As nearly as I can make out the map of this country around here, Bemis was making for this spot, intending to have his wife hide him here, until he was out of danger—when he ran away with the girl—with Miss Baxter."

"Very likely."

"Miss Baxter was an heiress, and he probably knew it. Men in the business he was in know of most all of the rich people in their neighborhood. Maybe he knew who Miss Baxter was when he took her in the car with him—and knew who Graham was, too. Suppose that when he was riding along that night with her beside him, he decided upon playing an entirely new game."

"The game of winning an heiress, do you mean?"

"Just that."

"It comes very near to being preposterous."

"Nothing is preposterous to a man like that."

"That is so."

"Besides, if he was supposed to be dead, he got a divorce in about a minute. All he had to do was to keep away from the woman on the mountain, and he wasn't married. She had already given him the merry ta-ta, and he had tired of her, so he just stepped down and out of existence as Mr. Jimmy Bemis, and bobbed up serenely as Mr. Paul Hadley."

"There is another objection: he could not know that Hadley was not married."

"Well, he could take chances as to that."

"True."

"And, say, there is another thing."

"Another?"

"Yes. When the chief read that cipher of Bemis' that took him to the place where the man had cached all the stolen goods, or the proceeds of them, only a small percentage of them was found. Do you remember that?"*

"Yes."

"Maybe Bemis had cached the rest of it somewhere else, for a nest egg, thinking that a day would come when he'd want to walk the straight and narrow; and that brings me to two reasons for this murder up here."

"Now you are getting at it, Danny."

"One of them is that the game of winning an heiress had progressed favorably, and he did not care to have a living wife, even if he was supposed to be dead himself; and the other one——"

"The other one would be that the remainder of his hidden treasure is somewhere near this place," said Patsy.

*See No. 767 of NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Blue Stain."

## CHAPTER XII.

### NICK CARTER TAKES A HAND.

"Mr. Daniel Maloney," said Patsy, with mock solemnity, after a short pause. "Do you see that roadster out there under the trees?'

"I do, sir," replied Danny, coming to attention, heels together, and grinning. "You mean that I have talked too much, and that I'd better mind my business of being a chauffeur?"

"No, Danny. You have talked very much to the purpose."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"This: The chief will have received my telegram some time ago."

"Yes."

"And I have got a hunch that when he gets it he will take the first train for Cranberry. If he does so, that would bring him there about the time you would get there, also, if you were to start at once. Try it."

"All right. I'm off!"

"If he isn't there on the next train in after you arrive, telephone to him, if there is a wire working—and there should be, by this time."

"Right-o!"

"Bring him out here as soon as you can get him here, even if you have to wait in town for him after you telephone."

"Yes, sir."

"And on the way out tell him all that you have just been saying to me, and as much more as you care to say on the subject, if he is willing to listen to you. Tell him that I suggested it."

"Say, you can bet your life that there isn't a word that I have said that he hasn't thought of already."

"Oh, we won't be so sure of that. He isn't infallible, you know."

"Maybe not; but he's pretty close to it. I'm off."

When Patsy was alone he made another tour of the house, the storehouse, and the grounds in the immediate vicinity, and with the same result that had been his before.

Then Patsy returned to the house and seated himself for a renewed study of the thirteen heads arranged on the chair.

But they told him nothing.

He had never knowingly seen Hadley, he had never seen Bemis. He turned away from the picture and picked up the book, lying open and face down on the table, that Eleanor Cooley had been reading before she had been disturbed the preceding night.

"'Charles O'Malley,' by Charles Lever," he read aloud, and added: "Queer taste for a woman, even if it is one of my own favorites."

As a matter of fact, Patsy was Irish enough to delight in the career of Charles O'Malley, and it was a story that he read at least once in each year.

He was turning the pages of the volume idly when he came upon a peculiar mark that arrested his attention—and instantly his mind reverted to the cipher that Nick Carter had found in books in the house where Jimmy Bemis had lived, in Barrington.*

But he laughed aloud at his own thought, and added to it this other one:

"If Bemis was a crank on the subject of ciphers, it doesn't follow that his wife was one; and there isn't the slightest indication that Bemis ever came here, although there is no doubt that he did so, when one stops to think about it."

He turned more of the pages, and came upon other marks; then more pages, and more marks. Finally, in spite of himself, he became interested in what he was doing.

"If a woman's husband is addicted to the study and creation of ciphers, and talks about them to her, she becomes interested in them," he told himself. "If a man buys hoofs and hides in the Northwest, for a living, his wife is bound to learn more or less about hoofs and hides before very long."

He turned back to the flyleaf of the volume and read an inscription to which he had given little attention at first. It read:

"To my dear friend, Bertha Carruthers, with love and admonition. E. T. C."

It bore the date of the preceding day.

Patsy tossed the book down to the table, and stared at the wrecked telephone instrument at the opposite side of the room.

Then he left his chair, and, crossing the floor to the telephone, he began an examination of it. Finally he turned abruptly aside and ran out of the house toward the log storehouse at the rear. When he returned, he carried a box of tools, which contained pincers, pliers, nippers, hammer, and other articles, and also some coiled lengths of insulated wire, evidently left at the house by the workmen when the telephone had been installed. He had seen them in one of his searches.

*See preceding issue of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Lost Clew."

Patsy was no mean mechanic, and he had an idea.

He began work on the telephone at once, first by adjusting it in the place from which it had been so ruthlessly torn.

The bullet through the battery case had done no harm, and there was no appreciable injury to the instrument save that the wires were broken, and those he quickly repaired. As soon as everything was in readiness, he moved the hook up and down.

But there was no responsive click. There was no connection at the other end of the wire.

He put the receiver on the hook, returned to the chair, and took up the book again.

"Anyhow," he told himself, "this end of the connection is all right. The telephone will work as soon as the connection at the other end is fixed, and they are probably fixing up another exchange in the village by this time."

Again he became absorbed in the book, unmindful of all else, and he was not long in arriving at the conclusion that Eleanor Cooley had made the same use of it as Bemis had made of certain books before then.

He recalled what his chief had told him in regard to those ciphers, and he applied the same principles to this present search, realizing that the woman would have followed out a system that she had been taught, rather than attempt to create one of her own.

And the inscription in the book had led Patsy already to believe that it had been intended as a present to the only friend that Eleanor Cooley had, not because of its value as a book, or because of its interest, but because it conveyed some sort of a message that was intended only for the eyes of Miss Carruthers.

He turned again to the first mark he had discovered, and which had arrested his attention. It was a circle, with a perpendicular line through it.

The second one was a circle with a horizontal line drawn through it.

The third mark was a circle with both a perpendicular and a horizontal line through it; the fourth had two lines through it, forming the letter X.

In the first mark there was a "4" before the line and a "3" after it.

In the second mark there was a "3" above and a "4" below the line.

In the third one was "1," "2," "3," "4," in each of the spaces, beginning with the one at the top, on the left side, and the fourth mark had this one exactly reversed.

All marks were neatly made with ink.

The book contained four hundred and twenty-eight pages, the first mark being on the hundredth page, the second one on the two hundredth page, the third one on the two hundred and sixtieth page, and the fourth and last one had been made on the three hundred and fiftieth page.

So far as Patsy could discover, there was not another mark of any description in the book, and without some other designation those four meant absolutely nothing.

It was plain that there was another part of the cipher—if cipher it was—hidden away somewhere.

He began, with haste, to examine the other books in that room, and there were many of them. But he pulled them all from their places one after another, searched them, and replaced them, without result. He had practically given up that part of the search and was speculating where else to look—when he was startled so that he stood upright.

The telephone bell was ringing.

Two jumps took him across the room to seize the receiver and put it against his ear.

"Hello!" he called. "Who are you?"

"Testing the wire for the new connection," came the reply, in a man's voice. "What is your number?"

Patsy looked at the box, and replied, giving the number; and he added:

"Wait a moment. I want to speak to you."

"Well?" came the reply.

"An automobile has been driven into the village in the last half hour by a man named Dan Ma——"

"I haven't got time to bother with such things," the man interrupted.

"It is important—of very great importance."

"All right. What is it?"

"The man is Dan Maloney. You will probably find him at the railway station with the car. Find him, and tell him that Mr. Garvan directs him to give you five dollars for your trouble as soon as he has called me up, and got me on the phone, here. Got that, and the names, all right?"

"You bet!"

"That's all—only the quicker you earn that five dollars, the better. I'll be pleased."

Patsy lighted a cigar and smoked like a chimney while he waited for the call. The twenty minutes that passed before he got it seemed like so many hours to him. Then the bell rang again, but it was Nick Car-

ter's voice, not Danny's, that Patsy heard over the wire.

"Hello, Patsy," he said. "I just got in on the train when the man found us. What is it?"

"Go to the house where Miss Bertha Carruthers lived. Danny will tell you all about her, on the way there. I have talked with the landlady where she lived—a Mrs. Laughlin. I'll tell you what I want, and I don't care a hang what excuse you make to get the things."

"All right. I'll get them if it includes the house itself."

"First, see if there is any book, or books, there, presented to her by Mrs. Cooley; the initials are E. T. C.—Eleanor Trent Cooley."

"Yes."

"Bring out with you all that you find; also all letters or memoranda that may have been written by Mrs. Cooley. Look particularly for a copy of 'Charles O'Malley,' by Lever."

"I know. All right. Is that all?"

"No. Arrange it so that absolutely nothing will be taken from that poor girl's room until you grant permission. We may have to search it again. And then, on the way out here, ask Danny to tell you all about that theory of his."

"I will."

"Just one thing more, in the way of information."

"Well?"

"I have found good evidence that another cipher exists, and that it will direct us to the hiding place of the rest of the stolen goods that Jimmy Bemis hid away. I think that all of it will be found here."

"Good!" said Nick.

Patsy lighted a fresh cigar and sat down, satisfied to wait.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A WOMAN'S CIPHER MESSAGE.

When Nick Carter and Danny arrived at the house on the mountain the famous detective carried with him just one book that he had selected from among the few that had been in the possession of Bertha Carruthers. It was also a volume written by Charles Lever, and was entitled "Roland Cashel."

It was inscribed on the flyleaf in exactly the same manner as the "Charles O'Malley" discovered by Patsy, and it seemed as if almost every page in it—of which there were four hundred, for it was printed in much larger type—had been marked with figures in red ink.

On the way out Danny had told the detective of all that had occurred on the mountain and in the village, beginning with the discovery of the Indian's head painted on the rock, and, therefore, no time was lost in useless explanations after his arrival. Patsy made a report of all he had done after the departure of Danny.

Then, while the others waited in silence, Nick Carter seated himself at the table with the two books before him, and began the study of the cipher.

It was plain to him at once that one book referred to the other, and that the cipher message could not be read at all without both. When he came to that conclusion, he sat for a moment, with closed eyes, in thought.

"Patsy," he said presently, "just look in the fireplace—there was a fire burning in it last night, wasn't there?"

"Yes; but we built a bigger one when we brought the woman in here."

"Well, see if there are remnants of charred paper there, that has had writing on it, in ink. You can find a scrap, probably, to answer the question, if one exists."

"I can answer it without looking," said Danny. "I built up the fire last night."

"Well?"

"There were four or five burned sheets of paper in the fireplace at that time, but they hadn't had writing on them. They had been covered with figures. I saw them plainly enough, as well as a scrap or two that hadn't been burned."

"Good! That is what I wanted to know. The knowledge tells us why Mrs. Cooley was busy with this

book last night, while the other book of the cipher was not here."

"Why, then?" asked Patsy.

'She was simply verifying the cipher message contained in this book;" and he held up the copy of "Charles O'Malley."

"Verifying it?"

"Certainly. The figures in this book, 'Roland Cashel,' refer to pages and words in the other one, 'Charles O'Malley.' She had probably retained copies of all these figures, and the number of the pages on which they were written. She was either engaged in verifying what she had already written, or she was adding to her message, intending to add new figures to the contents of 'Roland Cashel,' when the opportunity should offer."

"Well, can you make anything out of it?"

"I am beginning to do so. You see, we have got to follow out the same idea that Bemis used in his ciphers. She would have received her ideas from him."

"Naturally."

"So we must assume that the figures written on a given page of 'Roland Cashel' refer to words—not letters this time—on the page bearing the same number in 'Charles O'Malley.'"

"I see."

"For example, I will read figures to you now from 'Roland Cashel.' The cipher is really very simple, now that I understand it. You will observe that in 'Charles O'Malley' the average number of words to a line is fourteen. Notice it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I notice here that the figures never run over seventeen, which is the maximum number of words to a line, except in the cases where there are two dots made like a colon after a number, whereas, those numbers frequently run as high as forty-nine; and I find that we have forty-nine lines to a page in 'Charles O'Malley.' Again, the figures that follow a colon have dashes between them. Do you understand?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, the page in this book, 'Roland Cashel,' which contains certain figures, refers to the same numbered page in that book, 'Charles O'Malley.' Then we have a number followed by a colon, which represents the line on that page to be looked at first. We also have numbers with dashes between them, and these refer to words on that line as they are to be read. Then follows another number that is succeeded by a colon, which gives us another line, and so on."

"I see now."

"Very well. Write down the words that you find as I call the numbers."

"All right."

"Page six, line two. Write down the fourth, ninth, third, and first words; line six, the second and eleventh words; line twelve, the thirteenth word; line twenty-one, the fourteenth, ninth, eighth, first, and second words; line thirty, the eighth word; line thirty-four, the seventh, first, fifth, sixth, and seventh. That finishes this page. Now, what have you written down, Patsy?"

"'Remember your promises to me, dear, when you shall have read the secrets I have hidden here,'" Patsy read aloud; and then he gave his knee a resounding slap, and exclaimed: "By Jove, chief, you've got it!"

This explanation of the cipher should be sufficient for the reader, and we need not record the eagerness with which Patsy worked over the message that Mrs. Cooley had left behind her. The famous detective called out the pages and lines and the numbered words on the lines, as they appeared, and Patsy wrote them down upon sheet after sheet of paper. Occasionally the two men paused to read over what had been written, and, with each reading, they became more and more interested, for they speedily discovered that they were becoming informed of the secret of the life of the strange woman who had come to her death so tragically and so mysteriously.

The message contained in the book made as many words as is contained in this entire story of "The Midnight Message," and we cannot even attempt to repeat all of it here. It is only necessary to give an epitome of that strange woman's confidential communication to her one friend, Miss Carruthers, who, strangely enough, had been killed by a falling building at almost the same moment that her patroness was shot down by the ruthless hand of her burglar husband.

"My life has been a tragic one from its beginning," she told her friend, "and my experiences, if they could be told, might serve as a lesson to young girls who love not wisely, but too well." But we will not attempt to quote her.

It was long after her marriage to the man of her choice that she began to suspect that he was not all that she had believed him to be, but for several years it did not occur to her that he was really a burglar.

How she came to the knowledge does not interest us; nor need we concern ourselves about the intense suffering it brought to her, or with her determination to leave him, and to hide herself away where he could not find her, but where he did find her after a little less than a year.

He had, until the end came, represented himself to her as a dealer in precious stones, unique ornaments, and the like, and he had made her the custodian of his "collection," for it had always been his practice to save out of his ill-gotten hoard the purest and best of the diamonds and other precious stones, disposing of only those of lesser value, to meet their financial needs.

She had often watched him at work with books, and had discovered that he created ciphers in which he recorded everything that he did, and it was through a secret study of those ciphers that she really came to the perfect knowledge of what he was.

It had been the habit of Bemis to divide his "swag" into five parts. One—consisting of the purest and best gems of the collection—he gave to her to keep; the second—twenty per cent of the whole—he deposited in a safe-deposit vault, intending that to be returned ultimately to the rightful owners; the third—consisting of gold and silver melted down into bulk—he sold to dealers and to "fences;" the fourth—comprising the less valuable stones and ornaments—he disposed of as best he could, and put the proceeds in cash in different banks, in his wife's name, but under a signature which he could write exactly as she wrote it; the fifth—consisting of the actual cash he stole during his midnight maraudings—he gave outright to his wife, telling her each time that it was an extra profit that he had succeeded in making.

But there was always a great quantity of valuable jewelry which he did not succeed in selling, or otherwise disposing of, and all this he hid away, secretly. It was never his habit to dispose of anything he had stolen until at least a year after the theft. That practice greatly lessened the chances of discovery.

Having learned all these facts by secretly making herself familiar with the cipher her husband used in keeping his accounts, Mrs. Bemis now told all about them in another cipher of her own creation.

In her message to Miss Carruthers, the burglar's wife directed that one friend how to go to a certain place under the ledge on the Dublin road, and, by making certain measurements, seek, and find, the secret hoard of stolen wealth. She also said that if it were impossible, as it doubtless would be by this time, to return it to its rightful owners, to bestow it upon some form of charity. The writer's reason for so doing was told in a single paragraph, as follows:

"Jerome James Bixby, which is the name of my husband, has found out my hiding place. He has threatened me with death, and he will not hesitate to kill me when the time comes. More than that, there is another woman, somewhere, with whom he elects to deem himself in love. He found her one night, with others, beside the highway, after an automobile accident, and he fell in love with her while he was carrying her with him to a near-by village. She is an heiress, and, if it were not for me, he would marry her, if he could. If she should, in any way, respond to his addresses, he will kill me to get me out of the way of such a marriage. Her name is Phyllis Baxter, and she lives in New York. That is all I know about her. But I beg of you to seek her, and to warn her. If necessary, show her this cipher, and let her read it to the end."

When Nick Carter and Patsy took their departure from the house on the mountain, they went directly to the ledge near the Dublin road, and, by following the directions in the cipher, they found the buried treasure.

Nick Carter turned all this information, together with the treasure, over to the proper authorities in the State of New Jersey, supplying them with an affidavit to the effect that on information and belief he was

prepared to testify circumstantially that the burglar of Barrington, supposed to be dead, was really alive, living under the name of Paul Hadley, and that undoubtedly he also had killed the said Hadley in order to assume his name.

The detective sent a letter to Mr. Roger Graham, giving him, in substance, the same information, and adding to it excerpts from the cipher message of Mrs. Cooley to Miss Carruthers, relative to Miss Baxter. Also, he wrote to Miss Baxter herself, reciting all that Mrs. Cooley had said concerning her in her cipher letter. He also wrote to the father of Miss Baxter.

To only one of these three letters did he receive any reply, and that was from Roger Graham, who said, in part:

"I am very grateful for your letter, and the good intentions it expresses. I can only say that I have no interest in Miss Baxter, beyond a friendly one. I have tried to see her in regard to what you write, but am informed by her father that she is away from home, and is not expected to return for a long time. As regards Paul Hadley, he has left my employ, and I have no knowledge of his present location. I think, though, that you are wrong in your reference to him. He is Paul Hadley, without a doubt. I am convinced of that."

There was nothing for Nick Carter to do in the matter, then, but to wash his hands of it, having put the whole matter up to the proper authorities in the State where the crimes occurred.

But the Paul Hadley then alive, we, the readers, know to have been Bemis, alias Bixby, and, while Nick Carter and his assistants were morally certain of that fact, there was absolutely no way of proving it, because the only persons who could assist in the proper identification refused to take part in it, or were prepared to swear literally that Hadley was Hadley, and not Bemis, at all.

So what could Nick Carter do? Nothing but what he did do, which was to wait, firm in his belief that justice would triumph at last, in some measure—as justice did, thus:

In the sequel of this strange story, which is all true as told, Bemis, or Bixby, and Miss Baxter were secretly married, and they parted as soon as the words were pronounced that made them man and wife, to meet again, shortly after that, and to spend their honeymoon at the home of an aunt of the real Paul Hadley, who had not seen him since he was a boy; and, after that they were separated again for many months, until he went after her at last, and attempted for the second time in their experience to run away with her in a motor car—only to be overturned on the road in New Jersey, not far from the scene of their first meeting, and to meet with an accident which deprived her of her reason and him of his life.

So ends the strange tale of the message at midnight—in the utter disappearance of Phyllis Baxter, creating one of the greatest mysteries that has ever convulsed New York; in the death, by accident, of Jimmy Bemis, alias Bixby, who died in a hospital as Paul Hadley, without a suspicion being raised at the time that he was other than the man under whose name and personality he had so long masqueraded.*

*See second story preceding this one, entitled "The Blue Stain," for the full account of the end of Bemis, and the disappearance of Phyllis Baxter—No. 767.

THE END.

"The Turn of a Card; or, Nick Carter Plays a Skillful Game," is the title of the strange story which is told in the next issue of this weekly—to be published on September 30th. Extraordinary as have been other adventures of the famous criminal investigator, most readers will agree that in this case he had to do with one of the most absorbing, baffling, and generally attractive mysteries which ever was offered to him for solution. It concerns a singularly interesting young woman, who, despite her wonderful performances on the stage, is absolutely unknown to any one connected with the theater in which she appears. Why she conceals her features under black enamel and appears as mysteriously as she disappears is one of the problems which Nick Carter has to solve in connection with others of exceptional importance. No person who has been following the fortunes of the celebrated detective should remain uninformed concerning this adventure, which he numbers among the most interesting of his experiences.

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